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FANTASY IN GREEK AND ROMAN LITERATURE

Graham Anderson



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Fantasy in Greek and Roman Literature

Fantasy in Greek and Roman Literature offers an overview of Greek and Roman excursions into fantasy, including imaginary voyages, dream-worlds, talking animals and similar impossibilities. This is a territory seldom explored and extends to rarely read texts such as the *Aesop Romance*, *The Battle of the Frogs and the Mice* and *The Pumpkinification of the Emperor Claudius*.

Bringing this diverse material together for the first time, Anderson widens readers' perspectives on the realm of fantasy in ancient literature, including topics such as dialogues with the dead, Utopian communities and fantastic feasts. Going beyond the more familiar world of myth, his examples range from *The Golden Ass* to the Late Antique *Testament of a Pig*. The volume also explores ancient resistance to the world of make-believe.

Fantasy in Greek and Roman Literature is an invaluable resource not only for students of classical and comparative literature, but also for modern writers on fantasy who want to explore the genre's origins in antiquity, both in the more obvious and in lesser-known texts.

Graham Anderson is Emeritus Professor of Classics at the University of Kent, UK. He has written extensively on ancient fiction and fantasy, including *Fairytale in the Ancient World* (Routledge, 2000) and *Greek and Roman Folklore* (2006). He has just completed an anthology of ancient fairy tales for Routledge.

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Fantasy in Greek and Roman Literature

Graham Anderson

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Preface

If you had the opportunity to go up to heaven and have a conversation with Zeus, what do you suppose the pair of you might talk about? And if you wanted to find an access to Cloudeuckooland outside Aristophanes, where might you begin to look? Or if you wanted to talk to the ghost of Achilles, but would rather not perform a blood-sacrifice first of all, where might you expect to do it? These are the sorts of questions which might lie comfortably within the compass of literary fantasy and can prove very elusive if one tries to explore them from somewhere else. Other questions are not so straightforward: why, for example, in all the wonderlands we can evoke from the Ancient World, does there seem to be nobody quite like Alice?

The idea of a book on ancient fantasy grew out of a commentary on a single fantasy-dialogue of Lucian; it embodies the kind of information and perspectives I should have been glad to fall back on when I began. To a great extent, it aims at two different audiences: those classicists for whom fantasy scarcely exists at all as a literary phenomenon, and those writers on modern fantasy for whom the ancient world remains a closed book.

I have opted in the first place for a mainly thematic approach because that furnishes to both categories of reader some indication of what materials ancient authors could use as a basis of fantasy; it gives us some idea at least of what is 'out there'. I have resisted any temptation to attempt a history, far less a 'development', of fantasy; it is clearly available at the very beginning of Greek and Roman literature and is more or less fully formed from the outset. If anything, its existence in classical literature has been as a force to be contained and constrained by the proprieties proper to more rational and realistic literature. I have generally seen fantasy as overlapping with imagination, but going beyond it; I have chosen to illustrate for the most part, and to keep my illustrations within bounds. I have also allowed a reasonable measure of overlap between chapters and allowed the resulting repetition. Fantasy refuses to be fully compartmentalised, and celestial flights or animal metamorphoses will recur again and again, as will Europa's bull and conversation with Homer, in often widely differing contexts. By the end of the book, I hope to have reached a point where I should have wished to have started in the first place.

I have profited greatly from discussion or correspondence with those whose trajectories have crossed my own. Roger and Agnes Cardinal were a rich source of ideas when we co-taught at Kent on a Comparative Literature course entitled *The Tale*; Christopher Chaffin similarly offered a fund of ideas when we shared a course on Atlantis. I have learned a great deal from a number of titles by Daniel Ogden, and from association with Richard Stoneman's project dealing with the expansion of the *Alexander Romance*. One chapter opened the Classical Association (CA) conference in 1990, while another formed an inaugural lecture in 1994; I am grateful to the inquisitive audiences on both occasions. I am also grateful to the four Routledge referees who contributed numerous insights and sought to limit the definition of fantasy and confine it to the manageable.

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Abbreviations

ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
AP	<i>Anthologia Palatina</i>
ARV²	J.D. Beazeley, <i>Attic red-figure vase painters</i> , 2nd edn Oxford 1963
Contr	<i>Controversia</i>
CP	<i>Corpus Priaporum</i>
CPhil	<i>Classical Philology</i>
D.Mar.	Lucian, <i>Dialogi Marini</i>
D.Meretr.	Lucian, <i>Dialogi Meretricum</i>
D.Mort.	Lucian, <i>Dialogi Mortuorum</i>
Ep.	<i>Epistolae</i>
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
Met.	<i>Metamorphoses</i>
NA	Gellius, <i>Noctes Atticae</i>
NH	Pliny the Elder, <i>Natural History</i>
Or.	<i>Oratio</i>
PIR²	<i>Prosopografia Imperii Romani</i>
Sat.	Petronius, <i>Satyrica</i>
Symp.	<i>Symposium</i>
VA	Philostratus, <i>Life of Apollonius of Tyana</i>
VS	Philostratus, <i>Lives of the Sophists</i>
YCS	<i>Yale Classical Studies</i>
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>



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1 Introduction

What is fantasy? And where should we look for it in the literature of Greece and Rome? How universal is the climate of disapproval of it? Do writers manage to get away with it under some other guise? Do some literary genres accommodate it more comfortably than others? These are the kinds of questions we can hope to raise about an area of ancient literature still all too rarely explored as such, and the prospect of finding answers will vary considerably.

Towards a definition

The term *fantasy* can be applied to any material that is felt to be impossible (or nearly so), in contrast to the normal workings of the real world.¹ This is consistent with a well-established meaning of the term *phantasia* in Antiquity itself, where it can be applied to the forming of concepts in the mind, hence ‘imaginary’ and often far-fetchedly so; there is a tendency to associate fantasy with the wilder reaches of the imagination, but its usage is conveniently flexible.

A number of categories overlap with fantasy without actually coinciding with it: fantasy can find room for such concepts as the miraculous, the absurd, the grotesque or the uncanny, and others can be readily added.² Fantasy in Antiquity need not constitute a genre as such, though it may find itself allied to one, as in the case of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* (*The Golden Ass*), which is readily described as a fantasy novel and incorporates all the elements from the miraculous to the uncanny suggested above. Again, fantasy is an essential ingredient in myth or fairy tale, without coinciding completely with either or demanding definition of each in turn.

Moreover, it should be emphasised that practitioners of fantasy may not feel bound by any theoretical definitions at all. Neither Homer nor Aristophanes needed to work within theoretical guidelines, rather than relying on simple opportunism or whim. Hence it will be worthwhile to keep the boundaries of fantasy flexible, rather than devise definitions designed to limit its operations.

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Imagining the gods, or a three-headed man

As it happens, we do have an exotic setting in which one of our most explicit discussions of *phantasia* itself takes place: the philosopher Apollonius of Tyana is discussing the portrayal of the gods with Ethiopian sages:³

‘Your Phidiases’, said (the gymnosophist) Thespesion, ‘and Praxiteles went up to heaven and copied the shapes of the gods and worked them by their art; or was there something else, which drove them to do their moulding?’ ‘There was indeed something else’ replied Apollonius, ‘and it was replete with wisdom’. ‘What’, asked Thespesion, ‘for what could you say other than imitation?’ ‘Imagination’ (*phantasia*), said Apollonius, ‘wrought these, a craftsman more cunning than imitation. For imitation will fashion what it knows, whereas imagination will create what it does not know; for it will suppose with reference to reality, and terror will often deter imitation, where nothing can deter imagination, for it proceeds undismayed toward the goal it has set for itself. And it is necessary when you imagine the form of Zeus to see him with the heavens and seasons and stars, just as Phidias did once upon a time, and to fashion Athena conceiving camps and cunning and crafts, and how she leapt from the head of Zeus. But if you fashion a hawk or an owl or a wolf or a dog, and put them in temples in place of Hermes and Athena and Apollo, your wild beasts and birds will seem praiseworthy as likenesses, but the gods will lose a great deal of their dignity’.

Here then is *phantasia* used to denote ‘imaginative conception’: the human capacity for forming realistic and plausible conceptions in the mind corresponding to the realities outside. As Longinus put it: ‘when inspired by passionate enthusiasm, you seem to see what you put before the very eyes of the audience’.⁴ But such material may also be banal and routine rather than strikingly imaginative. Here is a good example from Lucian of a useful distinction:⁵

If one of those daring poets told you there was once a man with three heads and six hands, and if in the first instance you were to accept this without question, and you believed it without asking if it were possible, he would at once fill in the rest of the details, that he had six eyes and six ears and three voices and ate food through three mouths and had thirty fingers, not like each one of us only ten on both hands. And if he had to fight a war, each of the three hands would hold a shield—be it light, oblong or round—and three would hold an axe, throw a spear, or use a sword; and who would disbelieve someone saying all this, for it would follow on from the start at which it was necessary to examine whether it could be accepted and agreed?

In this instance, the invention of the three initial heads and six hands would be an example of fantasy, of bold invention, while the filled-in details of everything else that followed would correspond merely to the most banal quarter of imagination.

Some examples from Longinus

The testimony of Longinus is particularly illuminating in the no-man's land between imagination and fantasy. For him also, *phantasia* amounts to a kind of ability to perceive what is unseen—*imagination*, as we should term it; but in fact, the examples he gives, for the most part, coincide with what we should regard as fantasy, tending to push the boundaries of imagination to their limits. He begins with two examples of poets presenting Orestes inflicted by the Furies. First, Euripides' *Orestes*:

Mother, I pray you, do not drive at me the bloody faces of these snake-like women! Look there, look there, they are leaping right onto me.⁶

We also find the description of Phaethon being taught to ride:

When he heard this, Phaethon seized the reins, struck the flanks of his winged team and let them go, while they flew towards the vales of the air. His father behind him, mounted on the dog-star's back, instructed his son: 'drive there, turning your car now in this direction, now in that ...'⁷

Longinus has no lack of other examples on offer: for him, Aeschylus and Euripides both envisage Lyncus' palace itself as seized by a Bacchic frenzy, and Achilles appears above his own tomb. Longinus comments on the element of romantic exaggeration and the exceeding of the bounds of credibility; this is the practice of poetry, whereas the orators are bound by a greater degree of restraint, although those of his own day have reverted to the devices of tragedy: 'But our clever orators these days, like the tragedians, see Furies, and fools that they are cannot grasp that when Orestes says "Let go of me ..." he is only imagining this because he is mad'.⁸

Fantasy or mouse-epic?

So much then for a preliminary look at terms, which we shall find ourselves revisiting from time to time. But let us begin our own exploration with an illustration of what we can all agree is a fantastic situation: a single combat is in progress between a weasel and a mouse whose name is Trixos ('Squeaky'), 'best mong the mice':⁹

But his ancestral soil did not receive him back again,
For first a weasel took him by the middle and gobbled him up,
And his wife was left at home, her two cheeks torn,
In the nibbling-chamber where she knew many nibblings.

When the messenger has reported the news to her, Hermes leaves the feasting on Olympus and makes his way to the place where the figs are laid out to dry;

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an assembly of mice takes place, to the dismay of the weasel. The papyrus ends with the speech of a revered mouse, who had foreknowledge from his father of the dire event.

We might have no difficulty in acknowledging that such an episode is fantastic in conception, but where do we go from there? Not necessarily into a study of ‘the fantastic in antiquity’, but rather into a trail of critical enquiries that will help us somehow to explain the fantastic elements away. We shall of course want to relate such a piece to the fully extant *Batrachomyomachia*, the ‘Battle of the Frogs and the Mice’, and hence into some sub-department of Epic Parody; then we shall be happily within the realms of the familiar, and safe from the risks imposed by too much imagination.¹⁰

Crumb-Snatcher is my name, and I am the son of Bread-Cruncher my noble father. And my mother was Lick-quern the daughter of royal Ham-chewer ...

But at least we shall be in good company.

Disapproval of fantasy

Ancient writers who mention fantasy tend to do so in a dismissive sort of way; perhaps the classic statement is contained in the opening lines of Horace’s *Ars poetica*:¹¹

*Humano capiti cervicem pictor equinam
iungere si velit et varias inducere plumas
undique collatis membris, ut turpiter atrum
desinat in piscem mulier formosa superne,
spectatum admissi risum teneatis, amici?
credite, Pisones, isti tabulae fore librum
persimilem cuius, velut aegri somnia, vanae
fingentur species, ut nec pes nec caput uni
reddatur formae.*

Should a painter wish to join a horse’s neck to a human head, and collect various feathers onto limbs from all over, so that a lovely woman should degenerate into a dark fish, would you, my friends, when admitted to see it, be able to restrain a smile? Believe me, Pisones, a book will turn out just like such a picture, if it appears like the vain dreams of someone disturbed, so that neither head nor foot can be fitted to the same form.¹²

If we want to compress the anti-fantasy manifesto into no more than two words, Horace gives us the means to do so later on in the *Ars*: *incredulus odi*—‘I don’t believe it and I don’t like it’. And Horace is scarcely alone in taking such a stance.

Even a critic with the insight and apparent ‘modernity’ of Longinus, speaking of the *Odyssey*, can still say¹³

It is as if the Ocean were retreating into itself and staying quiet within its own boundaries. From here on there seems to be the ebb of Homer’s greatness, as he wanders in the mythical and incredible. Saying this I am bearing in mind the storms and the business of the Cyclops and other such, but I am talking about old age, yet it is the old age of Homer; but in all these cases myth dominates the real world.

It is not necessarily a desire for realism that provokes such comment. It is rather a regard for the sense of propriety¹⁴ (*prepon*) that so deeply imbues the Hellenistic and subsequent ages.

In search of fantasy

Having established that fantasy occurs in ancient literature and that it was strongly discouraged in some quarters, we can begin to ask where to look. There was clearly a place for it in Epic, as the quotation from Longinus has just reminded us, and indeed the fantastic episodes in the *Odyssey* belong only in the real world in what we might suggest as a sub-category of ‘travellers’ tales’. The more closely we look at Homer’s presentation, the more we are conscious of how little the fantastic elements are accentuated; nothing is made of Polyphemus’ single eye beyond what is minimally necessary for the main action of the story, the blinding of the Cyclops by a single stroke. But fantasy in Epic is not confined to what we can identify as a folktale strand in one poem, Achilles’ battle with the Scamander, while the very brief description of the chimaera in the Bellerophon story¹⁵ contributes something quite foreign to the day-to-day din of battle in the inner books of the *Iliad*.

If we wish to find a genre whose roots are firmly embedded in fantasy, we must look elsewhere, in particular to Athenian Old Comedy; here, fantasy is the rule rather than the engaging exception to be explained away. This is where one must look to find a one-man common market in the middle of a real war (Aristophanes’ *Acharnians*), or fantastic cities with fantastic constitutions, peopled by birds and able to drive away land measurers who appear from nowhere, or negotiate with Prometheus, complete with parasol (*Birds*). It is also where we shall find gods practising *otium cum dignitate* in the Underworld as they umpire the weighing of tragic diction on a weighing-machine (*Frogs*); to say nothing of treaties that are really wineskins, or negotiation scrolls that are at one and the same time erect *phalloi* (*Acharnians*, *Lysistrata*). All such features are the norm in a carnival genre, and one cannot do better to characterise its imaginative processes than look at the passage wherein Socrates’ chorus of Clouds explain to Strepsiades how readily they change their shape into whatever circumstances demand:¹⁶ did Strepsiades ever see a cloud in the sky like a centaur or a wolf or a woman?

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The Clouds can be all of these, depending on whether they are looking at the hairy fool Hieronymus, the fraud Simon or the effeminate Cleonymus.

Elsewhere in ancient literature we are less inclined to look, yet wherever we do, we should not have to look for too long. Roman Elegy we tend to regard as the vehicle for the private feelings of lovers, in at least a plausibly realistic series of relationships, yet this is also the genre where it is quite the thing to have talking doors relating their private feelings about the lover(s) on one side of them and the lady on the other,¹⁷ or where one can be wandering in the opposite direction to one's mistress's house and be waylaid by a force of Cupid-police—to be let off with just a caution.¹⁸

In Roman Satire, too, we might assume the writer's preoccupation with the concerns of the real world; yet even in Horace, a talking statue of Priapus breaks wind in the middle of the night to frighten two witches gathering accessories for their ghoulish rites,¹⁹ and Odysseus consults Tiresias for instructions as to how to become a *captator*, a legacy-hunter, of a usually Roman variety.²⁰ So, too, in the ideal and at most semi-realistic landscapes of the pastoral: we can point to a mention of the eye of Polyphemus, meticulously described, as the reason why Galatea is spurning the advances of her shaggy wooer.²¹ And the sepulchral Epigram as a genre is based on the fantastic conception that the dead are able to engage in conversation with the living passer-by.²²

Only history, among literary genres, might seem exempt, and yet we can find in Lucian's essay on historiography an *adynaton*, an impossible scenario, like the following:

It would have been the easiest thing for Thucydides with one single pen-stroke to upset the counter-wall at Epipolae, sink Hermocrates' trireme, and pierce the accursed Gyllipus while still in the act of blocking off roads with his walls and ditches, and end by putting the Syracusans into the quarries and letting the Athenians sail around Sicily and Italy as Alcibiades originally hoped.²³

Once we set out to look for fantasy, we can surprise ourselves by how much we can find in quite central authors whose preoccupations we take to be very different. Leaving aside the Horace of the *Satires*, we can note in the *Odes* the hideous curse-poem against the lineage of a harmless fallen tree—leading by way of some moralising sleight of hand to a vision of the Underworld distinctly favourable to Horace;²⁴ or a certain encounter with a wolf, put to flight by the very sight of a poet thinking about his lady-love Lalage;²⁵ or perhaps most engaging, the last *Ode* of Book II with its controversial third stanza:²⁶

*Non usitata nec tenui ferar
pinna biformis per liquidum aethera
vates ...
iam iam residunt cruribus asperae
pelles et album mutor in alitem
superne nascunturque leves
per digitos umerosque plumae*

I shall be carried through the liquid air as a two-formed bard, on no
accustomed or insubstantial wings ...
Already rough skin settles on my legs,
And I am turned to a white bird, and smooth feathers are formed
On my fingers and shoulders ...

Such a poem is especially interesting because it puts modern scholars on the spot as regards their own response to fantasy. Many will recall Edouard Fraenkel's analysis:²⁷

This detailed description, appropriate to the kind of tale which we know from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, is in the context of this ode repulsive or ridiculous, or both: repulsive, because the lofty idea of the transfigured *vates* leaves no room for the crude zoological precision of *residunt cruribus asperae pelles*; ridiculous, because the person who undergoes this metamorphosis is not some poet or a typical poet but a definite individual represented in the reality of his personal life, *pauperum sanguis parentum* and *quem vocas, Maecenas*; he is Q. Horatius Flaccus, whom the people of Rome knew so well, *corporis exigui, praecanum, solibus aptum*. Picture this plump and bald little man turning into a swan, complete with *asperae pelles* and all; *Spectatum admissi risum teneatis, amici?*

It seems to me rather as if Fraenkel has seen the point and then elected to miss it again. If Horace wishes to cast himself in a rather droll mock-serious vein, then it is his privilege to do so. It is simply that Fraenkel does not like to see an author who epitomises values one ought to approve making a fool of himself in a whimsical way—as any writer of fantasy may not hesitate to do.

The operation of fantasy

How does fantasy work? There can be no strict rules, or at least no ancient ones. But artful unobtrusiveness will go far towards establishing an ambience in which fantasy can function. How does one render dramatically credible the myth of the punishment of Prometheus, for example? Not necessarily in the Aeschylean manner, by furnishing elemental forces Kratos and Bia ('Power' and 'Force') to impale the Titan,²⁸ but rather the way the following prose dialogue proceeds: Hermes and Hephaestus search carefully for a site in the Caucasus—not too high so as to be out of sight, not too low so as to be within reach of men, and clear of snow to let the rivets be driven in. Then Prometheus has to be asked to cooperate:²⁹

Hermes: Don't delay, Prometheus, but step up and let yourself be pegged down onto the mountain.

Prom.: But you at least, Hephaestus and Hermes, have pity on me in my ill-deserved misfortune.

Hermes: You're saying, Prometheus, that we should be crucified in your stead, as soon as we disobey orders! Or do you not think the Caucasus is big

enough to make room for two others crucified beside you? But stretch out your right hand; and you, Hephaestus, see it's secure and nail it, and bring down your hammer with force. Now the other one; let it be held down securely too. Good. And the eagle will fly down soon to eat at your liver, so as to reward you for your fine and clever workmanship in clay ... (While they wait, there will be time for speeches)

Hermes: You will make a pointless and unnecessary plea. But have your say nonetheless. For we have to wait till the eagle flies down to see to your liver; it would be good in the meantime to have a hearing of a sophistic display, as you are the craftiest of wordsmiths.

Lucian has here brought the celebrated scenario of the *Prometheus Bound* into the arena of the Second Sophistic. By stressing the mundane practical details, he has slipped past the most improbable detail of all—the eternal gnawing of the self-renewing liver—and he has neatly updated the scene into the present: even half-way up the Caucasus is a suitable venue for an *akroasis epideiktikē*, a sophistic display.

Often fantasy is taken as a pejorative term when one is speaking of rhetoric. It is easily felt that as rhetoric becomes more and more cultivated in the hothouse atmosphere of the schoolroom, so it is given over to the more fantastic flights of verbal imagination. Some examples verge on the extreme: the Silver Latin Epic poet Lucan has a Caesarian hero propped up on the spears that transfix him because he cannot fall down—in this position, he plucks the arrow out of his eye-socket with the eye still attached to it, before making a speech full of epigrams to the effect that there is need of fewer missiles to allow him to die, not more.³⁰

Inevitably we tend to see fantastic narrative in some kind of instinctive contrast to 'the real world'. In fact, the two frequently converge, perhaps most obviously in the scheme of Petronius' *Satyricon*. Here we have a thoroughly earthy narrative anchored to the modern world of everyday and to the standard banalities of everyday thought and utterance, but one in which character and situation alike tend to become larger than life: Trimalchio is 'over the top' in almost every detail, except those used to trap his guests into the illusion of reality. In particular, his command of mythology offers *sui generis* fantasy in its own right,³¹ and so do his instructions for his tomb:³²

Besides it should be a hundred feet on the road-ward side, two hundred back into the field. I want there to be all sorts of fruit around my ashes, and lots and lots of vines ... I'm asking you to make ships in full sail, and me sitting in the seat of judgement with my purple-bordered robe with five gold rings, pouring coins in among the people from a sack ... There should also be if you like a banqueting-hall and you should show all the people enjoying themselves. On my right you should put a statue of my dear Fortunata holding a dove, and she should be leading her little puppy tied to her belt, and my little pet, and amphoras well sealed to prevent the wine from spilling out ... and a clock in the middle, so that everyone who looks at the time is forced to read my name.

Trimalchio wants a tomb that 'has everything', but only succeeds in describing a monument of bad taste.

Some themes are inevitably fantastic in their execution: Utopian schemes, celestial flights, dialogues of the dead. The celestial flight offers particularly fruitful possibilities: first, one may choose an improbable flying contraption, and an unusual way to get airborne, before coming a cropper in due course:³³

I reflected once again and asked myself whether this was where the end of the earth was, and this was where the heavens sloped downward. So I wanted to find out the truth. I gave instruction for two of the birds there to be captured. For there were two huge white birds, extremely strong and tame, as they did not run away when they saw us. And some of the soldiers sat astride their necks and they carried them upwards. They feed on carrion so there were very many such birds that came to us because of the dying horses. And so I gave instructions for two to be captured and not fed for three days. On the third day I ordered wood like a yoke to be made and for this to be attached to their necks. Then I constructed a kind of basket of oxhide; I got into it and held a spear seven cubits long with horse liver on the end. At once the birds flew up in order to eat the liver and I was borne aloft with them in the air, until I thought I was close to the heavens. I shivered all over because of the cold from the beating of the birds' wings. Then a winged figure with the appearance of a man met me and said: 'Alexander, do you seek the heavens when you have not understood matters on earth? So turn back quickly towards the earth and avoid becoming food for the birds'.

A similar sort of variation is contained in Alciphron's *Letters of Parasites* 3.23. The parasitic Limeterus ('Hunger-gut') discusses the dream he has just had: he was a good-looking young boy snatched up to heaven by an eagle, only to be struck by a thunderbolt and find that the eagle becomes a vulture and he himself falls back down to earth without a stitch.

Animal metamorphosis and pathetic fallacy are perhaps the most widespread mode of conveying sophistication with imaginative effort and getting away with it. In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, it takes close on three books to establish the climate in which a metamorphosis can take place. And even then it comes as something of a surprise. Its authenticity is guaranteed by the corroborative detail: Lucius' hair turns into bristles, his tender skin hardens into hide, his fingers and toes coalesce into one, and so on and so forth; but it has also been authenticated by the fact that the witch he has been spying on has already turned into a bird, and all that is wrong this time is not the act of transformation itself, but the end form.³⁴ Once Lucius' identity as an ass is established, its limits are ruthlessly adhered to: he can hear conversations through his long ears, but can only utter all too limited exclamations on his own account.

Plutarch seems an unlikely contributor to this particular area, and yet he produces a dialogue between a man and a pig, with a quite unexpected twist to the mythical basis of *Odyssey* 10. It is perhaps not any great surprise to find the

dialogue taken up at the point where Circe would be changing back the animal mutants into men, but it is a considerable stroke of invention to have his crewman reluctant to change back to human form because the life of an animal is actually preferable.³⁵

Another route to fantasy is offered by transmigration: a cobbler finds that the rooster he keeps as his timepiece has a voice—because he was once Apollo, then Euphorbus, then Pythagoras, and many other characters besides. This means *inter alia* that he can be used as an ‘authority’ for the Trojan War. He claims to have killed Patroclus (Euphorbus had only wounded him), only to be reminded by his master that he was then killed in turn by Menelaus.³⁶

Longus and the elusiveness of myth

But perhaps it is inevitable that the most effective fantasies are almost by nature impossible to classify. One of the most obvious examples is the passage of Longus’ *Daphnis and Chloe* in which the aged Philetas tells the adolescent pair the nearest he can bring himself to revealing the facts of life. This turns out to be a tale of how Love, portrayed as a conventional Cupid, has commissioned him to look after this new loving couple. Philetas has found Eros playing in the garden; the little boy points out that he has not done any damage, that he is hard to catch, and that he is there to look after Daphnis and Chloe:³⁷

“‘I am difficult to hunt down even for a hawk or an eagle, or some other bird quicker than these. I’m not a child, even if that’s what I look like, but I’m older than Cronos and older than time itself’ ... Saying this he leapt like a young nightingale onto the myrtles, and changing from one branch to the next he crept through the foliage to the top of the tree. I could see that he had wings growing from his shoulders, and a little bow between his wings’. Daphnis and Chloe were delighted as if listening to a fairy tale rather than a report and wanted to find out what love was—whether he was a boy or a bird, and what were his powers.

The interest is not in the details of the portrait of Love itself; it is rather in the fact that Daphnis and Chloe cannot themselves conceive of Love in the first place. Is he a boy or a bird? The most conventional vision in the eyes of the inexperienced has turned into a fantastic narrative, while to us as sophisticated readers it can be felt as something else again: the nearest that a puritanical peasant narrator can come to an ‘embarrassing’ subject.

Conclusions

To sum up, we have noticed that fantasy does indeed exist in ancient literature, and that it is available in a wide range of genres and through a wide range of techniques and presentations. It is, if anything, encouraged in the general efflorescence of rhetoric, but it does not too often lose touch with the real, which can

help to reinforce its wildest details. But all the way, it has to fight against common sense and the attitudes of propriety that this engenders.

Notes

- 1 This is essentially the definition suggested by Rogers and Stevens (2017), 9 (but in less polysyllabic form).
- 2 For related concepts (Enchantment, Parody and the like), Flugt in Rogers and Stevens (2017), 47–62.
- 3 *VA* 6.19.
- 4 Longinus 15.1.
- 5 Lucian, *Hermotimus* 74.
- 6 Euripides, *Orestes* 255–7, cited by Longinus 15.2.
- 7 Longinus 15.4: Euripides *Phaethon* fr. 779 Nauck.
- 8 Longinus 15.8. See further Russell (1981), 108ff.; Armisen (1979, 1980).
- 9 Michigan papyrus (P.Mich. Inv.) 6946, ed. H.Schibli, *ZPE* 53 (1983), 1–25.
- 10 *Batrachomyomachia* 27–9.
- 11 Horace, *Ars Poetica* 1–9.
- 12 On the marvellous in the *Ars*, Citroni in Hardie (2009), 19–40.
- 13 Longinus 9.13f.
- 14 For the concept, Horace *Ars* 308.
- 15 *Iliad* 21.211–327; 6.179–82.
- 16 *Clouds* 346ff.
- 17 E.g. Catullus 67, Propertius 1.16. See still F. Copley (1956) for the topos.
- 18 Propertius 2.29. See further c. 9 below.
- 19 Horace *Satire* 1.8. See below c.9.
- 20 Horace, *Satire* 2.5. See below c.2.
- 21 Theocritus *Idyll* 11.30–33.
- 22 See below c. 2.
- 23 Lucian, *How to Write History* 38.
- 24 Horace *Odes* 2.13.
- 25 Horace *Odes* 1.22.
- 26 Horace *Odes* 2.20.1–3, 9–12.
- 27 E. Fraenkel, *Horace*, (Oxford, 1957), 301. For an opposite view, Citroni in Hardie (2009), 23f.
- 28 [Aeschylus] *Prometheus Bound* 12f.
- 29 Lucian, *Prometheus or The Caucasus* 1f., 4.
- 30 Lucan, *Pharsalia* 6.196–246.
- 31 *Satyrica* 59.4f. (see Appendix below).
- 32 *Satyrica* 71.6–11.
- 33 *Alexander Romance* Recension B 2.41; cf. Lucian, *Icaromenippus* 10.
- 34 Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 3.24.
- 35 Plutarch, *Moralia* 986E.
- 36 Lucian, *Gallus* 17.
- 37 Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe* 2.5.2–7.1.



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Part I

Themes of fantasy



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2 Otherworldly conversations in antiquity

At the very outset of Greek literature, we find a living man talking to a variety of dead ones. We can look at some of these otherworldly conversations¹ and ask what sort of patterns they might display; they may be banal, amusing or surprising by turns. We can begin, then, near the beginning of surviving Greek literature with that intrepid voyager to other peoples and places, Odysseus. In book 11 of the *Odyssey*, we find him talking to the dead in the land of the dead,² having been given instructions on how to communicate with them by means of a blood offering which revives their ghosts. Now, our hero has a busy schedule in the Underworld: he has to see the blind bisexual prophet Tiresias about his travel arrangements home; he has to meet his mother to receive news of his family; and he even has an impasse with his old comrade-in-arms, Ajax, who refuses to speak to him even in Hades because of an unresolved quarrel on earth. Yet the memorable encounter among all these is the interview between the living Odysseus and the dead Achilles, most formidable of the Greeks who had fought at Troy:³

Resplendent Odysseus, do not console me for my death;
I should prefer to be a bonded serf at the plough,
A man with no land to his name, without much to live on,
Than to rule over all the perished corpses.

Notice the economy of such an interview: Odysseus does not need to ask about the Achilles heel, because he was at Troy himself when Achilles was actually killed, just after the end of the *Iliad*. What we are given here is rather a characterisation of Achilles, pretty much as he had been in life; in the *Iliad*, he had been concerned with his own glory at the expense of his fellow Greeks, and his interest in status and social hierarchy simply continues after death, although his fortunes have changed. We are not told why it is so worthless to be king of the dead. He does not tell us he is bored; it is presumably the ‘strengthlessness’ of the ghost-corpses that is so frustrating after his superhuman strength in life.

There is, however, a slightly more encouraging angle at the end of the *Odyssey*. Achilles and Agamemnon, likewise dead, are hanging round the entrance to Hades and are comparing their deaths, rather as people nowadays might talk about their operations. Agamemnon tells Achilles what a wonderful funeral he

(Agamemnon) had provided for him, which of course Achilles has had no means of knowing about because he is already dead. And Agamemnon bewails the indignity of his own death, not on the battlefield at Troy but butchered on his homecoming by an unfaithful wife and her lover. But the monotony of this predictable conversation is broken by a host of new arrivals—the ghosts of the suitors whom their friend Odysseus has just massacred—so they have the opportunity to be happy for his safe homecoming and his resourceful protection of his ever-faithful wife. Here we have possibilities; an imaginary dialogue of this kind can catch mythological scenes as they actually happen, rather than petrify them as part of an irretrievable past.

More talking to the dead

Odysseus and his friends, then, have set the agenda for conversations with the dead. And certainly there is no shortage of people later in antiquity who want to conduct some kind of conversation of the same kind, and one poetic form provided the most characteristic means. This was the funerary epigram: the short poem, sometimes no more than a single elegiac couplet, originally destined for a tombstone, in which an imaginary dialogue can take place between the passer-by and the occupant of the tomb. Here is what starts as a peculiarly pessimistic version from the *Palatine Anthology*:⁴

Charidas, what lies beneath?
 A great deal of darkness.
 And what are the paths of return?
 A lie.
 And Pluto?
 A myth.
 Then I'm done for!
 This tale of mine is the truth. But if you want to hear something pleasant,
 A great ox costs only a little.

Here, the writer has compressed his little Underworld dialogue almost to vanishing point. One-word answers deny the traditional Underworld, but there is a cleverly timed surprise: there seem to be none of the cost-of-living worries in the Underworld that there are in the world above. Other presentations may offer a mere monologue on the part of the dead, supposedly talking to a passing traveller, asking the passer-by to pause long enough to read a brief account of the life of the deceased, often with the implication 'as I am now, soon will you be also'.⁵

Nor is such conversation necessarily confined to verse. Ancient rhetorical handbooks found room for a figure entitled *eidōlopoiia*, 'image creator', allowing a speaker to address or communicate with someone deceased.⁶ A celebrated use of this in Plato's *Phaedrus* has Socrates asking Lysias to convey a message to (the long dead) Homer; imitation of this figure has the empress Julia Domna being told to tell Plato not to be angry with the sophists either.⁷ And the figure

enjoys a place in at least some of the preliminary exercises (*progymnasmata*) of the rhetorical schools.

But there is a strong alternative tradition of fantasy and comedy as an antidote to the grimness of the afterlife, and there is also a whole series of opportunities to upgrade the Underworld from a sort of concentration camp for corpses into a lively and bustling community with some intellectual pretensions of its own. Aristophanes' Underworld in *Frogs* at the end of the fifth century BCE, some three centuries after the *Odyssey*, has some new features: not only Charon's boat and the lake it sails over, standard furniture of the popular underworld, though Charon does not figure in *Odyssey* 11; but also, when Dionysus in *Frogs* goes down to the Underworld disguised as Heracles, he finds that they have barmaids and some sort of hostelry for the entertainment of Heracles, complete with dancing girls.⁸ But he finds something even more surprising, something that the Underworld has in common with a modern university: there is a vacant chair of drama, and Pluto invites Dionysus in person to act as the assessor. Naturally this calls for some explanation. Dionysus is as unaware as we should expect to be, not only that there are chairs in the Underworld, but also that there are very interesting rules for those who compete for them. There is a *thronos* for all the *technai* that are prestigious and require cleverness (*megalai kai dexiai*), and the privilege is that one dines at the public expense (a tradition absent from most modern universities), and indeed has a seat next to Pluto himself. But there is a catch: you apparently lose tenure of a chair in the Underworld when someone better in your field comes along. And that is what has happened in the Underworld of *Frogs*: Euripides has come down and has made himself popular with the *plēthos*, all the highwaymen, burglars and patricides, and they want him to replace Aeschylus in the Chair of Tragedy.

We can see what has happened here; the Underworld is not really any longer a place unfit for heroes to live in, as it had been for Achilles. In the three centuries that separate Homer and Aristophanes, higher education has arrived in Athens, as well as dramatic entertainment, and Hades has to reflect the cultural shift; it has become a kind of Oxbridge of the Dead, pulsating with academic scandal, which it will take the rest of the play to resolve.

By the early Roman Empire, the encounters in the Underworld take on further possibilities. In Horace *Satire* 2.5, we have an extension of the celebrated consultation between Odysseus/Ulysses and Tiresias in *Odyssey* 11.⁹ The prophet had noted already in Homer that his enquirer faced a bleak future; he will have lost the goods acquired en route, and the suitors have already been wasting his substance. So how, Ulysses now asks, is he to repair his shattered fortunes? Tiresias is to hand with practical but cynical advice: Ulysses will have to turn himself into a *captator*, a legacy-hunter, by practising the basest arts of flattery and subservience and smuggling himself into other people's wills. Ulysses is initially indignant; after all his heroism and suffering at Troy, this is too much. But on being assured that this is now the only way, he nerves his heart to it, in just the same terms as in the *Odyssey* itself, he endures the shame of the serving girls who slept with the suitors (*Od.* 20.18). Moreover, he is even to be prepared to pimp his famously chaste wife Penelope to assist

his schemes. We are accustomed to view the colouring as thoroughly Roman, but it is worth noticing that in Lucian's Greek *Dialogues of the Dead*, the same *captatio* is treated in a variety of situations, without any particular sense of incongruity.¹⁰ Lucian may of course have drawn unusually on Roman material in the succeeding century. There is no attempt, and no need, for Horace to offer detailed scene-setting; only a call from Persephone at the end is needed to remind us where we are.

Besides epigram and comedy, there is a rather late genre, comic dialogue in prose, which specialises in mythological subjects. Its most prolific exponent, Lucian in the second century CE, has contrived no fewer than 30 *Dialogues of the Dead*, and here again the Underworld is obviously as good a place as any for settling old scores or dealing with unfinished business. Now one of the most controversial characters in antiquity—to this day—is Alexander the Great. Lucian has a dialogue in which his success is challenged, and challenged quite effectively, by Hannibal in the Underworld. The Carthaginian is challenging Alexander for his pre-eminence in generalship; it is *peri proedrias*, over seating in order of precedence, quite literally. In our parlance, it is as if the pair are candidates for some subterranean Chair of Strategic Studies. And the argument is not about how many corpses they managed to produce so as to swell the constituency of the Underworld; it is once more largely on intellectual grounds that Hannibal makes his appeal to Minos as judge of the Dead.¹¹

This one thing, Minos, I'm pleased about, that here I've learned to speak Greek (he goes on to say that the people he fought were real men, Romans, not Persians like Alexander's enemies, the sort of people who went to war wearing long trousers, regarded as effeminate by the Greeks). And I achieved all this despite being a barbarian, without a Greek education, and neither reciting Homer like this man nor educated by Professor Aristotle, but only making use of my natural talent.

First of all, we realise that Greek writers have a very Hellenocentric view of the world. They naturally assume that the language of the dead is Greek, and Hannibal is tacitly assumed to have been forced to learn it as some sort of infernal language requirement. This is in keeping with the practice in the Upper World; it was not until the end of the second century CE, probably not long after Lucian's death, that the African Emperor Septimius Severus allowed vernacular languages to be admitted in law-court proceedings in place of Latin or Greek. Secondly, Aristotle is described here as a *sophistēs*, not so much a professor in our sense as a kind of slick television don or ancient equivalent, an expert communicator somehow tainted with charlatanism. But overall here we can see, as in Aristophanes, a strongly cultural consciousness: the ruler of the dead is a *pepaideumenos*, an intellectual, capable of taking a corpse's cultural profile into account—in vain, as it happens, since along comes Scipio Africanus, conqueror of Hannibal, to endorse the claims of Alexander, so that Hannibal can only come third in the Strategic Studies stakes.

Conversations with the gods

In a number of cases, it is not the Underworld where otherworldly encounters are to take place, but the world of the gods, whether they are on the traditional Mount Olympus or, more commonly in later antiquity, located in a far more vague and more remote heaven. The classical world was not the first to send its man up to heaven; the Sumero-Babylonian myths of Etana and Adapa had got there first.¹² So we can suspect that there was a well-established round of pagan St. Peter-at-the-Gate jokes early on in classical literature itself. What ingredients do we need for encounters of this sort? It would be rather a waste of time to imagine someone going up to heaven if they are simply to report ‘the gods were feasting, but because I was a mere mortal I was not allowed in’. Instead, the sort of writers who deal with this kind of subject introduces an element of surprise—perhaps even on the part of the gods themselves; perhaps they are due for a fright, or perhaps they will not themselves be there—or perhaps there might even be a language problem.

We find an early illustration of the possibilities in Aristophanes’ Comedy *Peace* of 421 BCE. The hero Trygaeus (‘Harvester’) is tired of the Peloponnesian War and decides to go up to heaven to get the gods to do something about it. So he mounts a massive dung-beetle and off he goes up to the sky. The sanitary arrangements for the journey we need not discuss, but of course Aristophanes does so in his usual way. What concerns us is the conversation when he arrives:¹³

There I see the house of Zeus, right enough:
Who’s Zeus’ doorkeeper? Won’t you open up?

Hermes answers; he thinks he sniffs a man; and then he gets the fright of his life when this messy malodorous giant beetle is confronting him with a man on top:

King Heracles, what’s this?
—A beetle-horse.
O foul daring, shameless creature,
Foul, and all-foul and foulest of the foul
How did you come up here, foulest of the foul?

Trygaeus is not to be outdone; he now has to answer the traditional name, rank and number questions:

What’s your name? Won’t you say?
—Foulest.
What is your lineage, tell me!
—Foulest.
Who is your father?
—Mine? Foulest.

All this is in vain, because it turns out that Trygaeus has just missed the gods by a day; they have taken themselves off to the very top of heaven, leaving Hermes behind, because even the gods need someone to mind the *chutridia kai sannidia kai kamphoreidia*—the pots and pans and the benches. The gods need a domestic skivvy, and Hermes is the dog's body, below stairs in celestial terms.

There is a more refined arrival scene in heaven from the early Roman Empire, where one rather exceptional work gives us glimpses of dialogue in both the upper and lower worlds. Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* has a Roman emperor going up to heaven;¹⁴ Roman emperors were routinely deified on their deaths, by official ratification in the Roman Senate. Now the Senate did indeed deify Claudius, but his old enemy Seneca was the tutor of Claudius' successor Nero, and he presents a scene of total incomprehension when the dead emperor reaches the gates:¹⁵

Word comes to Jupiter that someone quite tall has arrived, with a shock of white hair; he was threatening something, for he was vigorously shaking his head; he dragged his right foot; he was asked where he came from: he gave some reply with a muffled confused sound, and no-one could make him out: he was neither Greek nor Roman nor of any known race. Then Jupiter ordered Hercules ... to go and find where he was from.

He is disconcerted by the creature's appearance, but goes up to him and says *quod facillimum fuit Graeculo*—the readiest thing to occur to a glib Greek:

Tis pothen eis andrōn, poiē polis ēde tokēes?

Who art thou and whence of men, what thy city and parentage?

Claudius gaudet esse illic philologos homines: sperat futurum aliquem historiis suis locum. 'Claudius was delighted to find scholars there: he hoped to find some place for his histories'. So Claudius himself has a go now in Greek; he claims, like Odysseus, to have travelled from Troy to the land of the Ciconians, but Seneca says the next line was more appropriate: 'I sacked a city and destroyed the race' ...

It is interesting to compare this treatment of Claudius only just after his death in 54 CE with a satire by an actual Roman emperor some 300 years later. Seneca was writing about the death of Claudius after only four emperors had reigned; Julian the Apostate, the last pagan emperor, writes about emperors in the heavens after a great many more such persons had been and gone. In Julian's book, Claudius is admitted to the banquet of the gods, although he receives heavy sarcasm from their resident jester Silenus because he is nothing without his wife Messalina or his freedmen Narcissus and Pallas, but the two emperors on either side, Gaius Caligula and Nero, are both consigned to Tartarus.¹⁶

Some visitors to heaven were differently motivated. Lucian in the century after Claudius puts a man into orbit to find out the secrets of the gods, not because there has been any lack of speculation about the nature of the divine, but because there has been far too much. And his man, the Cynic philosopher Menippus, flies up with a vulture's wing on one side and an eagle's on the other, to have no fewer

than three encounters: first with a philosopher who is hanging around the moon; then with the moon herself, or the lady in the moon; and finally with Zeus.¹⁷

His entry into heaven is rather like that of Claudius. As usual, Hermes is at the door, there is the usual *tis pothen eis andrōn* and so on. This time the gods are actually still around in heaven and are taken completely by surprise. But Menippus is taken on a guided tour by Zeus in person, and at last we have a conversation about the weather—doubly appropriate, since it fills the time, and it is quite useful to talk about the weather to someone who can do something about it:

As he walked (Zeus) asked me about things on earth, first of all those familiar topics, the price of corn in Greece, and whether last winter had been a hard one for us, and whether the vegetables could do with more rain. Then he asked if any of Phidias' family were still around, and why the Athenians had neglected the Diasia for so many years, and if they had plans to complete the Olympieion, and whether the robbers of the temple in Dodona had been caught.¹⁸

Notice the preoccupation with the banal and everyday, as not infrequently in tempering the tone of fantasy; and with Zeus' own self-interest.

Some exotic settings

There are other places for men to go to encounter unlikely creatures. If heaven and hell are the favourites, they are by no means the only places: the moon, the planets and some exotic earthly paradise are obvious enough resorts. As more places become known to the Greek world through exploration, it was possible to construct travelogues to faraway places in which the natives are presented as somehow or other able to relate to the arrival of Greeks on the scene.¹⁹ When the philosopher Apollonius of Tyana goes to India in the first century CE, he allegedly talks to Brachmanes who live on a dramatic hilltop setting and are held in awe by the local community. Almost the first topic of conversation is Achilles; the Brachmanes feel that Greeks are too preoccupied with their own past, while the mythical past of India is unknown to them. The chief Brachman then claims that one of his own community is a transmigration of the soul of Palamedes, the Greek warrior at Troy alleged to have invented writing.²⁰

Much discussion has attended the background of this and similar passages. There was every reason for there to be some residual knowledge of Greek culture in India after Alexander's conquest, and archaeological proofs now are swinging towards support of Hellenic survival in India, but this conversation report has been undermined by the claim that the Brachmanes practised levitation, and that Apollonius joined them in levitating three feet into the air. But what does Philostratus actually say?²¹

They struck the earth holding their staffs straight up and down, and the ground curved like a wave of the sea and sent them three feet into the air.

The floor here acts as a trampoline, and there is nothing impossible about the action.

After these long and exotic detours I return to an interview with Achilles. The same Cappadocian holy man, Apollonius of Tyana, had a dialogue with him very different from that of Odysseus with Achilles in book 11 of the *Odyssey*. Apollonius' biographer Philostratus describes a hero cult at Troy where Achilles is buried, and where the holy man can conjure him up not by blood sacrifice but by prayer; he comes out of the ground and grows to a superhuman height, and then he asks the sage what he would like to know—in no more than five questions. The implication is that Achilles actually is available for interview, but that it all has to be kept within bounds. It is question three that interests us here: was Helen of Troy actually at Troy? Answer: 'no, she wasn't, and it didn't take the Greeks too long to find out; but they started so they had to finish, so that Menelaus had to finish the ten-year war before picking up Helen from Egypt on the way back'. This is a subversive version of the Trojan War, needless to say one known to Euripides, whom we have already met as (an unsuccessful) candidate for the Chair of Drama in the Underworld.²²

Heroic correspondence

Not all communications with elsewhere needed to be by direct spoken dialogue. The ancient world developed a considerable industry of fictitious letters.²³ These might involve communications between historical figures, or members of occupational groups like the parasites or courtesans invented by Alciphron. They might even involve mythological figures, as in the case of Ovid's *Heroides*, where he can rely on the educated reader to be already familiar with the background of most of the heroines who relay their plight to their absent heroes.

Often, the timing of the letter is critical.²⁴ Ovid chooses the unusual point in the story of Paris and Helen where Paris has written a lover's note, in the first instance to Helen in Sparta. Already there is a past to narrate—her futile abduction by Theseus—but the whole expression of Helen's feelings is coloured by what we already know is going to happen in the future (17). She is able to admit that he would have impressed her had he wooed her with the thousand suitors—proof enough that she is capable of reciprocating his feelings. Moreover, the judgement of Paris can now be presented from the least usual angle, when Helen hears of it for the first time not as a 'fact' of Greek mythology but as a report from her would-be seducer:²⁵

But Venus gave her agreement to this, and that three goddesses should show themselves naked to you in the recesses of high Ida. And that one of them would give you a kingdom, another prestige in war, but the third promised you marriage with the daughter of Tyndareus. I can hardly believe that they submitted their heavenly bodies to your judgement, and even if that is true, at least the rest is fiction, that I am said to be the bribe for your judgement.

Helen also knows about Paris' previous love, Oenone, partly from rumour, partly from Paris himself; and Jason is correctly used as a chronologically prior example.

A different time-frame offers different possibilities, as when Hypsipyle writes to Jason himself in full knowledge of his adventures with Medea up to his return to Thessaly with the fleece.²⁶ She is able to recapitulate the Colchian adventures as a complaint that he has not written to her about them, and she knows about a barbarian poisoner as his new wife, a status he had promised herself We are now given a more detailed account of how a messenger arrived from Thessaly and Hypsipyle's emotional commentary on his speech. We are in the world of Deianira in the *Trachiniae* in a careful management of viewpoints. Affections for Medea are put down to her witchcraft. Hypsipyle can now apprise Jason of the children she bore him—and of the fact, presumably known only here, that she had had a mind to send them to Jason 'as her ambassadors'—deterred only by the prospect of Medea as their step-mother! The reader is, of course, fully aware of what Medea would eventually do with her own children; Hypsipyle is accordingly shown to have had sounder judgement than Jason.

Conclusions

What, then, can we learn about the way the ancient world viewed the other worlds beyond its ken? The assumption always seems to be that communication is possible, in an eventually intelligible language, and there will be matters of at least common interest to be discussed. After initial shock or surprise, characters in other worlds may be found to be a little more ordinary and mundane than we expect, but there is a great deal of the more sophisticated side of human communication imported into the remotest regions, right down to a faculty of subterranean studies in more than one treatment of the Underworld.

And it is on that note that we may wish to end. Aeschylus is not the only professor among the dead. We have an epigram attributed to Lucian in the second century CE:²⁷

Tell me, Hermes: how did the soul of Lollianus descend to the hall of
Persephone?

Amazing if he went in silence: no doubt he wanted to teach you something.
The very idea of meeting him, even as a corpse!

No conversations in the Underworld are actually recorded with this eminent sophist Lollianus of Ephesus, professor of Greek rhetoric in Athens in the early second century CE. But we may have reviewed enough to enable us to imagine one

Notes

- 1 The topic could have been included with fantastic voyages and other worlds in c. 4, but the extent of examples seemed to justify separate chapters.
- 2 For ghosts and necromancy, Ogden (2001), 219–230.

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- 3 *Odyssey* 11.488ff. Commentary: Heubeck (1995).
- 4 *AP* 7.524.3ff.
- 5 For the convention, R. Lattimore (1962), 266–300 *passim*.
- 6 For *eidōlopoiia*, Aphthonius 44: ‘The speaker is a known person, but dead and no longer able to speak, like the character Eupolis invented in his *Dēmoi* and Aristides in *On the Four*’ (tr. G. Kennedy 2003).
- 7 Plato *Phaedrus* 278 BC; Philostratus *Ep.* 73. See further Anderson *CPh* 72 (1977), 43–45.
- 8 Aristophanes, *Frogs* 503–515.
- 9 See further Rudd (1966), 224–242; commentary: F. Muecke (1993).
- 10 Lucian *D. Mort.* 16–19, 21.
- 11 *D. Mort.* 25.2f.
- 12 For these texts, Dalley (1989), 182–202.
- 13 *Peace* 178ff.
- 14 Commentary by Ball (1902) and Eden (1984). See also Relihan (1993), 75–90.
- 15 *Apocolocyntosis* 5.
- 16 Julian, *Caesares* 310. See further Bowersock in *YCS* 27 (1982), 159–172; Relihan (1993), 119–134.
- 17 Lucian, *Icaromenippus* 13–25. See further c. 13.
- 18 Icar. 24. See further Anderson *Philologus* 124(1980), 159–161.
- 19 See J. Ferguson, (1975), *passim*.
- 20 *VA* 3.22.
- 21 *VA* 3.17.
- 22 *VA* 4.16.
- 23 For study and collections, Costa (2001); Trapp (2003); Morello and Morrison (2007); Rosenmeyer (2013).
- 24 Commentary on the double letters: Kenney (Cambridge, 2008).
- 25 *Heroides* 17.115–122.
- 26 *Heroides* 6.
- 27 *AP* 11.274. For Lollianus, Philostratus *VS* 526f.; *PIR*² H203.

3 Talking animals, monstrous creatures

Fables are perhaps the most familiar form of ancient fantastic storytelling to us, but long familiarity in childhood perhaps still encourages us to take the fantasy element for granted. Although a few animal species have powers of mimicry, especially among birds,¹ in general they do not talk; still less do they play at being rhetors or sophists. We tend to associate fables with a supposed author (Aesop) and with a specific type of subject-matter (moralising stories of talking animals), though much of the fable-collections' contents are in fact far more miscellaneous.² The fable was incorporated early into literature in some way or other, and more or less literary workings of it survive in the classical canon from Hesiod onwards through to the versifying fabulists of Late Antiquity. Both in elementary rhetorical practice and in poetry, fables were seen to have a literary place and literary possibilities. Animals can be made to belong to another, often better world, and could be felt to offer plenty of moral and even political lessons for this one. This can be shown from even the most elementary rhetorical exercise, where the schoolboy is required to retell an Aesopic fable in his own words. We are fortunate enough to have a school-master's example:³

The monkeys convened a council and deliberated about whether to found a city. They decided to do so, and were on the point of carrying out their project. An old monkey stopped them by pointing out that they would be more easily caught if they were captured within an enclosure.

As it stands, this is no more than the thinnest guise for a lesson in citizenship, but the master now requires the pupil to elaborate:

The monkeys convened a council and deliberated about whether to found a city. One speaker came forward to address the assembly, to persuade them in favour. 'For you see', he maintained, 'how happy men are because of their cities; each of them has a house, and all of them go to the assembly and the theatre and delight their hearts with theatrical performances and recitals of every kind ...'

(the pupil has to go on, mentioning the formal resolution and making a speech for the old monkey ...). Here in embryo we have a parliament of animals, with unlimited opportunity for sophisticated development. The first version as it stands may be no more than a moralising folktale, but the second is already halfway to fantasy.

Such exercises persisted in the Greek and Roman school; we have a complete late Latin example in the *Testamentum Porcelli*, in which the piglet Marcus Grunnius Corocotta ('Marcus Grunter Boarman-Roastpig'⁴) solemnly dictates his will before submitting to the butcher in the consulship of Clibanatus and Piperatus ('Oven-done and Pepper-sprinkle') in a parody of a Roman legal document.

More elaborate developments

In spite of the self-contained and generally miniature scale of most of the stories, the fable has considerable potential for larger development beyond the immediate rhetorical scope of individual examples. We have a complete parodic beast-epic of Hellenistic date in the *Batrachomuiomachia* (*The Battle of the Frogs and the Mice*), whose initial incident overlaps with a surviving fable of a frog and a watersnake.⁵ A recent papyrus publication of a *Weasel and Mice War* appears to be treated along the same lines;⁶ we should bear in mind the closeness of weasels in antiquity to the role we more naturally assign to the cat. One notes also a *Battle of Spiders* and a *Battle of Starlings*⁷ and possibly a *Battle of Cranes*,⁸ all known only by title. There are several fables in the standard collections with such a potential, as when dog ambassadors are sent to the court of the apes in an unusual tale of scatological misadventure.⁹ The obvious opportunities are illustrated by the *Batrachomuiomachia* itself—extended boastful speeches by the tiny warriors, especially comic in their application of Homeric epithets and genealogies to the combatants; and by the imposition of divine machinery, already once more a commonplace in the fables themselves ('the frogs petition Zeus ...').¹⁰

Thanks to many decades of discovery in Asiatic literatures, we now have a much clearer notion than was once the case, that 'Aesop' has a long history of predecessors in the literature (and art) of the Ancient Near East,¹¹ and we have also a much clearer notion of the scope of 'wisdom' literature, which is quite clearly not 'classical' in origin. It follows that any types we can identify are likely to be pre-classical, as testified by a range of Sumerian examples, already arranged in a number of collections from this earliest documented civilisation.¹² The fable may owe its existence to an ethos where all of nature is considered animate and equally wise; or to an observation, amply confirmed in classical times, that animals have both self-preserving instincts and social skills. The subject-matter of fable may often give some clue as to its age as well. Most 'Aesopic' fables are concerned with a nomadic hunting society, where the animals are dividing spoil on a 'might is right, survival of the fittest' basis. It follows that such a version as 'the fox and the cheese' is in that form probably much more recent than the version entailing fox and meat, where the cheese is an exclusively man-made object.¹³ Many fables, however, involve the use by animals of human institutions; where animals attend

an assembly, we are likely to be looking at a direct metaphor of human activity, though it would be a matter of observation that animals themselves do actually associate both within and between species.

The convention of enabling animals to talk defines the genre. Babrius accordingly attributes the animal fable to the Golden Age (Praef. 5ff):

In the Golden Age the rest of living creatures could articulate in speech and knew such words as we ourselves use when speaking to each other. And they would hold assemblies in the middle of forests. And the pine tree would talk, and the leaves of laurel. And the swimming fish would chat to the friendly sailor, while sparrows spoke intelligibly to the farmer ...’.

Everything so far has suggested a relatively small scale. But we should note the capacity of Athenian Old Comedy to embrace animal fantasy, often as an essential component of a dramatic plot. In Aristophanes’ *Wasps*, the inveterate Philocleon is cured of his obsession with serving as a juryman when he is enabled to sit in judgement on a dog that has stolen a piece of cheese and is indicted by a canine prosecutor; his son Bdelycleon calls to witness the pot, pestle, grater, brazier and water-jug, and has the grater actually in the witness-box.¹⁴ In this instance, one of the dogs as accuser does utter *au au* (‘bow-wow’); the defendant is too tongue-tied to speak. But in *Birds*, the avian characters have plenty to say; they have been taught language by the Hoopoe, formerly the Tereus of human myth, and are no longer barbarians.¹⁵ Participants may be unexpectedly cultured; even the camel is not without the muse, like the flute-playing fisherman.¹⁶ This aspect is capable of considerable development, where animals can be presented as flamboyantly eloquent. Sometimes the fable can even develop into mythological dialogue, alluding to a previous human existence:

The swallow said (to the nightingale) ‘Dearest, you are still alive! This is the first I have seen you since Thrace; always some dire ill-fortune has kept us apart’.¹⁷

We can test the artistic qualities of fabulists through several doublets, as when Babrius and Aulus Gellius retell the story of how the lark knew when to leave;¹⁸ similarly with the town mouse and country mouse in Horace *Satire* 2.6 and in Babrius 108. The fable is here presented at roughly the same length by both narrators, with enough divergence to allow us to see where difference is possible. The basic outline leaves little room for alteration; the main opportunities are in describing the contrasting diets of the two mice. Horace manages considerably more of a scare (door banging, mastiffs on the prowl), as opposed to the two routine human interruptions offered by Babrius to send the mice into a panic. But the main difference is the considerate nature of the country mouse, giving the best of its humble board to the town mouse, whilst the latter, as seems implied, takes first taste of all the town produce himself, even if under pretext of being the slave ‘taster’. The town mouse is also notably a philosopher, encouraging its friend to

a *carpe diem* attitude. Horace has managed a superior working altogether, presented as a countryman's tale attributed to his neighbour Cestius.

Sometimes too there are aetiological tales woven into the texture of fable: three grateful animals give their nature to three ages of man in return for hospitality (horse, ox, dog ...).¹⁹ Sometimes there is the implication of a childhood audience ('my child Branchus ...'²⁰). Sometimes there is a more pretentious background, as when Aesop is said to have told the story of the frogs who ask for a king; Aesop himself tells the tale during the tyranny of Peisistratus to curb unrest that might lead to worse; the frogs get Mercury to intercede with Jupiter.²¹ Where the combatants are not animals, they can still be no less fantastic (the North wind and the sun as combatants to steal a man's coat;²² War and his bride Insolence²³). Even in their most abbreviated form, the Aesopic stories in themselves have considerable scope for fantasy. Moral tales of cunning tricks gain considerable nuance when disguised in animal terms. For example, two men travel to the land of apes and are duly taken to their leader. He asks the deceitful man: 'Who am I?' and is assured that he is emperor, with his court of courtiers, officials, generals and military staff. His truthful companion points out that all of them are irretrievably apes. The inevitable moral has already become secondary to the telling of an amusing story with fantastic detail; we are listening to fantastic lies in a fantastic kingdom.²⁴ And the theme leaves scope for variation. In the next fable in Phaedrus' collection, king lion asks an ape whether or not his royal person suffers from bad breath (he has already killed flatterers for flattering and truthful animals for telling the truth); the ape escapes only by telling a sophisticated lie, that the lion's mouth has the fragrance of cinnamon, and smells like the altars of the gods.

A clear example of the blend of popular and sophisticated elements is to be seen in Babrius 48: a pious dog approaches the statue of the god Hermes and expresses its desire to pay its respects to the god by anointing him. Hermes is embarrassed by the dog's attentions; it must be content to limit its respects from a distance, lest it foul the statue. The account of the canine embassy to Jupiter develops this blend still further; the dog ambassadors are upset by the thunderbolt and forget their housetraining ...²⁵

A much more ambitious development is offered by a pair of fables in the novel by Achilles Tatius. Two examples are here juxtaposed and are used unusually as an actual prefiguration of an incident in the plot. The name of a surly servitor, Conops (Gnat), prompts a telling of 'the lion, the elephant and the gnat' (why should the lion be afraid of the cock when the elephant is afraid of the gnat?), which is not told out of scale to normal fables, but hints that Gnat will be a formidable opponent to Satyrus' and his master's amorous intrigue. Satyrus replies with the fable of 'the lion, the gnat and the spider', this time developed to much more ambitious length, casting the gnat in effect as a boastful sophist about to fall victim to the spider (Satyrus):²⁶

Let it be no laughing matter to recount my valour. For I am a total instrument of war; I am brought into line by the trumpet and my mouth is both trumpet and missile, so that I am simultaneously musician and archer. I am my own

bow and arrow, for my wings shoot me through the air, and as I attack I wound as if from a missile ...

Aside from the tales themselves, each fabulist we are able to study over the length of a corpus has his own literary personality; both Babrius and, more especially, Phaedrus will add comments in his own person, the latter in somewhat tendentious prefaces. If Babrius is talking in an *epimythion* about the evils of anger, we will be told 'there is some sort of nemesis for anger: may I guard against it!'²⁷

In the most sophisticated and creative fantasies, the animal can be presented as a scholar in the writer's own image. We can see this nuance most clearly by contrasting Ovid's poem on the death of his mistress's pet bird with that of Catullus on the same theme. The latter has treated his theme with precious simplicity:²⁸

My girl's sparrow is dead,
But as it used to hop around, now this way now that, it would chirrup only
for her.
Now it goes on its dark journey from which they say there is no return.

There is just a hint here of the other world for the sparrow, but nothing more; Ovid, by contrast, goes as usual for ingenious fantasy. Not a sparrow for his Corinna, but a *docta avis*—a parrot, a fit companion for his sophisticated girl, and one able to have the last word in death ... and beyond.²⁹

Beneath a hill in Elysium there is a dark grove of leafy ilex,
Where the moist earth is green with ever-growing grass.
If we place any belief in what is uncertain,
That is said to be the home of pious birds,
From which the impure are barred.
There innocent swans pasture,
and the eternally living phoenix, ever the only one of its kind;
The bird of Juno displays its plumage, and the seductive dove kisses its
eager mate.
The parrot is received among them, in their grove's abode,
And turns the pious birds' attention to his very own words.

Even here we have the mock-moral element: the parrot's discourse is for good birds only. Deservedly less well-known is Statius' reworking in an elegy for his patron Melior's parrot (*Silvae* 2.4). Where Ovid gives the parrot an advantage over mute birds, in this instance it is envisaged that all the *doctae aves*, those with a voice, should join the parrot.

The theme of the sophisticated animal as a moral instructor lies behind two lengthy dialogues in imperial Greek literature: Plutarch's *Gryllus* and Lucian's *Gallus*. *Gryllus*³⁰ is a dialogue between Odysseus and one of Circe's pigs.

The latter is a creature of surpassing intellect and insists that he wishes to remain a pig, not without considerable assurance:³¹

Grunter: All in all then, if you think you are more courageous than wild beasts, why do your poets call those who fight against their enemies most valiantly ‘courageous as wolves’ and ‘lion-hearted’ and ‘with valour like a boar’s’, but none of them called a lion ‘man-hearted’, nor a boar ‘with the strength of a man’, but just as I suppose we exaggerate when we call the swift ‘wind-footed’ and those who are handsome ‘godlike’, so do poets compare those skilled at fighting to those still better at it ...

Odysseus: ‘My goodness, Grunter, you seem to have been a skilful sophist, since even now speaking as a swine you have so enthusiastically addressed the case.

Along the same lines, it is established that crows are nine times more chaste than Odysseus’ proverbially virtuous wife Penelope, and nature has endowed them with all manner of professional expertise:³²

I hear that all the Egyptians are doctors, and every creature is not only his own specialist in healing, but in nourishment, in making war and hunting and self-defence and music, as far as is fitting for each in accordance with his nature. Who taught us pigs when we are ill to go to rivers to hunt for crabs? And who taught tortoises to eat marjoram after eating a snake?

Finally, the pig points out that man is not even set apart by belief in God; Odysseus’ grandfather was Sisyphus, the proverbial atheist.

For all its occasional touches of fantasy and delicate humour, this is still primarily a dialogue to instruct; Plutarch subscribed to belief in a Providence extending to animals, and he goes to laborious lengths to establish it from instructive examples of virtuous creatures. Lucian’s *Gallus* has plenty of moral lessons as well, when the domestic cock lectures his master the cobbler:

‘You would not see among animals a horse tax-collector or a frog informer, or a jackdaw sophist or a mosquito chef or a pathic cockerel’.³³

But the tone here is much lighter: Lucian knows how to handle such clichés to a purely comic end. The cock is in fact a transmigration of Euphorbus and Pythagoras. He has also to admit that as Pythagoras he played the part of a cheat and a trickster for good measure. Lucian adds that he played the part of the courtesan Aspasia, to say nothing at all of the other animals he transmigrated into.³⁴

By far the most ambitious fantasy text on a single animal theme is Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*. Its anti-hero Lucius is changed into an ass in the course of his investigations into Thessalian magic. While in the ass, he retains his human sensibilities throughout a series of humiliating adventures: the ass engages in scholarly

reflection and draws mythological parallels while he is beaten by robbers or threatened with mutilation. He compares the robbers' carousing to the banquet of Lapiths and Centaurs,³⁵ or he decides to take due advantage of the protection afforded by the *Pax Romana*:

I tried to invoke the august name of the emperor in the authentic tongue of the Greeks, and at least 'O' I exclaimed with cleverness and clarity, but the rest of Caesar's name I could not enunciate.³⁶

But Apuleius' tour de force is the lyrical promises made to the ass by the girl captured by robbers.³⁷ If he can carry her off,

First I will adorn your properly combed mane with my maidenly necklaces; the hair of your forehead already decorously curled I shall separate, and the bristles of your tail tangled and on end for want of care I shall carefully tie up with gentleness ... and with many gold ornaments I shall decorate you, shining like stars in the sky, and you will be celebrated with triumph in the joy of the people processing ... for I shall mark you with the everlasting witness of my present fortune and your divine providence, and I will dedicate a painting of our flight on the wall in the atrium of my house. And there shall be seen and heard forever in tales, rustic though they be, and from the pens of learned men, "The royal maiden fleeing captivity on the back of an ass".

Animal fantasy equally overlaps with natural history: zoology was on a scientific footing from Aristotle onwards, and travellers' tales, true or false, brought reports of exotic animals. It is only too easy for the two to merge—and degenerate; anything is possible in a world where Aulus Gellius seriously accepts Herodotus' tradition that lionesses can only bear one offspring (which lacerates the mother's womb³⁸)—without pausing to ask why there are still lions! Genuine and absurd traditions are easily perpetuated side by side: Aelian solemnly expects us to believe that ageing storks metamorphose into human form as a reward for their filial piety on the authority of Alexander of Myndos,³⁹ who has nothing to gain by making it up. Animals also play a prominent part in 'adoxography'—the rhetorical tour-de-force wherein the writer sets himself the task of praising the absolutely unpraisable. Dio of Prusa wrote the *Praise of a Parrot*, which is lost, but Lucian's *Encomium of the Fly* has survived. Still there is a strong hint of the fly's superiority, moral and spiritual, to mankind; we are told that Homer had compared Menelaus' courage to that of the fly; she dines with kings and travels like Scythians, makes love freely and yet does nothing by stealth.⁴⁰ But at the same time, she incidentally proves the immortality of the soul, as Plato accidentally omitted to state in the *Phaedo*; since a dead fly is (supposedly) revived when sprinkled with ashes, her soul transmigrates back to the body.⁴¹

The most celebrated and successful fantasy is often produced by the blending of two 'escapist' themes. Virgil's bees offer at once a blend of Utopia and animal adoxography; the bees have a kind of divinity (and a form of spontaneous

generation), unswerving divisions of labour and unshakeable loyalties. Virgil also takes the opportunity to give his bees a fantastic battle, and its closing remarks are not mere mock-heroism or parody; there is a pathos which belongs rather to fantasy in

These commotions in their hearts, these mighty contests—are reduced and laid to rest by the throwing of a little dust...⁴²

This approach is developed on a much larger scale by the author of the *Batrachomyiommachia*. On the face of it, this is pure parody: mice and frogs are invested with Homeric armaments as well as their Homeric genealogies.⁴³ But the ending is a mixture of pathos and the grotesque: the Son of Cronos, Father of Gods and Men, pities the distress of the frogs and sends in armoured crabs to part the combatants.⁴⁴

And there came suddenly back-mailed, curved-clawed crooked side-walking crack-nut jawed, shell-skinned, bony in nature, flat-backed: their shoulders glistened, their legs were bandy, they stretched their arms and their eyes looked behind; they had eight legs and two antennae, unrelenting creatures known as crabs ... All the mice were afraid of them and no longer did they stand their ground, but were put to flight. Already it was sunset and the end of the one-day war was accomplished.

Nor was this to be the last word in animal battles; Lucian could parody the *Batrachomyiommachia* in turn by multiplying the tiny creatures to a fantastic scale—fantastic hordes of Flea-Archers, Vulture-Cavalry and Puppycocks, each one of enormous dimensions in itself, transferred to the sky, fighting between moon and sun on a spider web, and making a peace treaty in the manner of Thucydides. But even Lucian can find room in the midst of wholesale parody of anything and everything for a touch of pure (and scholarly) fantasy:⁴⁵

It was a glorious rout, with many taken prisoner and many slain, and a great deal of blood dripped on the clouds, so that they were dyed and appeared red, as in our own world at sunset; and so much dripped onto the earth that I reckoned something of the sort happened long ago in the sky when Homer thought Zeus rained blood at the death of Sarpedon.

Old Comedy offers the most complete repertoire of animal fantasy; animal masks are implied for the choruses of Aristophanes' *Birds*, *Wasps* and *Frogs* and in many titles of lost plays. Among extant plays, the *Birds* gives the most central part to fantastic creatures. Aristophanes combines birds with almost every other conceivable topic of fantasy—a comic battle between the birds and Pisthetaerus, a blockade of heaven by the birds, intercepting sacrifices; an ideal Utopia, Cloudcuckooland, which has the distinction like More's *Utopia* of giving its name to a whole species of Unreality; a metamorphosis also, since the Hoopoe, spokesman for the

birds, was once a man;⁴⁶ and some comic hybrid creatures, when human charlatans come up to the sky trying to beg for wings from the birds. The most typical fantasy, complete with the usual animal moral, is the pair of myths of the generation of birds. Pithetaerus spins a yarn to prove that the birds have right of precedence by nature over man; the cock is known as a Persian bird and it alone walks with its crest erect—ergo, the cock is the predecessor of the king of Persia, who wears his tiara erect,⁴⁷ and among many other examples, the eagle is the bird of Zeus. The chorus of *Birds* adds a myth, in the manner of Hesiod's *Theogony* and Orphic examples. All the familiar elements—Chaos, Darkness, Night and Love—are present, but Love springs from an (Orphic) egg; therefore the birds, being helpers of lovers, are children of love, and so superior to mankind.⁴⁸ And once again, an element of pathos can be included among the nonsense and parody; the myth is addressed to man in his dim existence, as short-lived as the leaf, feeble, made of clay, shadowy and wingless and dreamlike, while only the birds are immortal and ethereal.⁴⁹

The folklore of fable

A mythology grows up over fable itself; if Babrius can attribute animal fable to the Golden Age,⁵⁰ Philostratus has a typical creation myth, after Plato's *Protagoras*, about the origin of fable:⁵¹

Once upon a time Hermes gave out the different kinds of gifts to all the great men. So one was given philosophy, another oratory, and so on down the line. When all the different gifts had been given out, Aesop was still there, and there was nothing left for him, until Hermes remembered the kind of stories he had heard from the Hours. And so Aesop was given Fables and he has them to this day.

Hence a little fable about fable-telling itself, with the added moral 'providence gives to each of us what is appropriate'. But, as often, the story is a little elusive and was probably just a fanciful tale intended simply to explain how Aesop came to produce fables. One of the Philostrati also offers what purports to be the description of a painting, with Aesop himself in the midst of a group of animals, the subjects of his fables, with the fox prominent among them, while he himself is apparently engaged in working out some new fable ...⁵²

A further such extension is offered by the ensembles that make up the complex of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. The adventures of Lucius accidentally changed into an ass afford obvious opportunities for allusion either to actual fables or to animal proverbs presupposing them, and in general, the ass lumbers through a society of Aesopic simplicity. The unusual personnel of priests of Cybele are here as they are in a contemporary Babrian fable,⁵³ though the punch line of that fable involves the flaying of the dead animal's skin, which of course cannot take place in Apuleius' tale. In the case of the story of 'from the peeping of an ass', his anti-hero Lucius conjectures that by betraying his master's hiding from soldiers in a loft by an

untimely appearance, he himself has originated the proverb.⁵⁴ The origin given in a fable collection is not identical, but is certainly parallel in function: the owner of an ass is facing prosecution because the peeping of the ass started a panic of birds, which wrecked a potter's shop.⁵⁵ Apuleius' development tends often to be in the character of the ass himself; the special position of Lucius enables him to be an ass raconteur and an ass philosopher and rhetorician, given to elaborate moralising reflections, prophecies of literary success and the like.

A special function of the fable is in instances where Aesop himself is featured in person, as telling a fable in a specific context: here we have often to do with a *chreia* setting up a short 'one-liner', but again with considerable opportunity for variation. We have an Aesopic version⁵⁶ of the story of an unnatural birth and a soothsayers' debate as to whether this is a portent. Aesop cuts through the non-sensical speculations of the soothsayers by advising that the herdsmen be given wives in future. Plutarch sets the story as a comic tale in the *Banquet of the Seven Sages*, but attributes it instead to Thales, in a gathering where Aesop himself is actually present.

These various examples underline that fable, as a genre, shares much material with other kinds of popular literature; a fable (or part thereof) may contribute to the adventures of Lucius in a comic novel, or it may annexe popular mythology, such as that of the Golden Age. In whatever genre talking animals appear, there will be opportunities for fantasy. But most fable material stands apart from the category of animal story which here follows. We do not expect fable to feature a dialogue between the chimaera and the minotaur, and it may be worthwhile to ask ourselves why not.

The traditional mythical monsters

In stark contrast to the animals of fable, comedy and belles-lettres, we can range the established canon of monsters which appear throughout Greek and Roman literature.⁵⁷

As early as Empedocles, we find a notion of the hybridisation of animal species. He postulates a first stage of animals and plants consisting of limbs not yet joined together; then comes a stage when such limbs are joined to make the kind of creatures seen in dreams; a third stage sees the formation of whole forms. The creatures of the second stage can have double natures, with faces and breasts on either side, or man-faced ox-progeny or ox-headed offspring of man.⁵⁸ Lucretius denies the scientific possibility of such hybrids as centaurs; the half-human, half-bitch Scylla; or the lion-goat-snake chimaera,⁵⁹ but by his very denial acknowledges their existence as imaginary creatures. Monsters are already well established in Epic mythology, but there are not too many of them. The standard repertoire—including such creatures as minotaur, hydra, centaurs, sphinx and chimaera—may owe their existence to a variety of local popular traditions over a wide area and time period, some perhaps long before Homer. It is rare for a creature like the hydra to be based on the Greek mainland itself. Most often there is only one such creature, and it belongs to the outer rim of the world known to the Greeks.

Typically, such creatures can expect to possess some magical vulnerability, so that they will succumb to a suitably armed hero, often with a divine warning of how the creature can be killed. The Nemean lion can only be killed with its own claws and the minotaur only by someone with a prepared escape-route from the Labyrinth; the sphinx will succumb only to the solver of its riddle(s); the hydra can be conquered only by the searing of its severed necks. The birth of monsters tends to be by hybridisation: the minotaur is the offspring of a genuine bull and the impassioned Pasiphae; hybrid may give birth to hybrid, as when the half-monster Echidna, herself the compound of maiden and snake, gives birth to the hydra itself (*Theogony* 304–315). One notes how rigid the tradition tends to be; we never expect to encounter ‘Theseus and the Sphinx’ or ‘Perseus and the Minotaur’; each monster-slaying hero has to have his own exclusive monster to overcome.

In some cases, it is fairly clear how and why such creatures could have been compounded in the first place. The Cretan bull-man could be seen as the product of a hostile Athenian tradition blending bulls used in an acrobatic ceremony at Cnossus with the memory of an oppressive Minoan political supremacy. The hydra is a water-snake which multiplies by dividing; this might easily be the embodiment of a treacherous and undrainable marsh at Lerna, when the springs cannot be prevented from reappearing. What is important for the history of classical fantasy is rather the license such creatures give to subsequent writers. To a Greek schooled in Homer, there could be little of fantasy left about the minotaur. It has been there a long time and can be taken for granted. It is only in the hands of Ovid that its grotesque effect is likely to be revitalised—as in a famous line which was regarded as embarrassingly over-ingenious, even in antiquity:⁶⁰ *Semibovemque virum, semivirumque bovem* (*Half-ox man, half-man ox*).

A particularly complex case focuses on the story of Medusa. Already in the *Iliad*,⁶¹ we find the monstrous face, though not directly connected with the story of Perseus, but simply as a terrifying motif on a shield (of Agamemnon, as it happens). There seems a considerable trail of development to encompass the motif of lithification by the sight of the monstrous head: Perseus is already depicted turning his head away from a *gorgoneion* on a seventh-century *pithos*.⁶² There, the gorgon is bizarrely depicted with a centaur body; at the other extreme, we note the motif of Medusa’s head as that of a beautiful woman. Once again we have the detail that the gorgons live far from the Greek world (not always in a consistent direction); they seem to be neighbours of the mysterious Graeae, sisters sharing one removable eye (and not consistently made up to three). Our problem is that the isolated emergings in both the literature and the art of Medusa do not really enable us to know whether much of the story already existed long before the isolated fragments of its appearance.⁶³

These ‘statutory’ monsters tend to occur early in the mythological canon. The chimaera already figures in Bellerophon’s adventure before the Trojan War. In a numbers of instances, these will already have been pre-Greek creatures long established in the Near East, but that may only displace the problem of why and how they were imagined in the first place.⁶⁴ In general, they do not have speaking parts in the surviving versions of myth. One tends also to find, at least in extant

literature, that the fantastic characteristics of fantastic monsters are not on the whole dwelt upon; there is very little to establish that Polyphemus is a giant, and his monstrous characteristics are emphasised by his cannibal actions rather than any horrific description. It is useful to contrast this with the version of the cannibal ogre in the third voyage of Sindbad in the *Arabian Nights*, where his grotesque appearance is dwelt upon in some detail. Similarly, even Echidna and Typhon tend to be described in the briefest possible compass in the *Theogony*, as is the chimaera itself in the *Iliad*.

Again, the Egyptian gods with their animal heads elicit horror in classical Greek texts. But they still have a fascination, as when Apollonius of Tyana visits Egypt and Ethiopia and remonstrates at great length on the subject with the Ethiopian sages:⁶⁵

Friends, you have obtained great benefit from Egyptian and Ethiopian wisdom, if a dog, an ibis or a goat seem more impressive and godlike ... but will oath-breakers and temple-robbers and the swarm of low-class entertainers despise sacred things of that sort rather than be afraid of them?

But long before, we find that Xenophanes had already stated the opposite absurdity: if animals were sculptors and craftsmen, they would make gods in their own respective images ...⁶⁶

The invention of any new creatures of this kind was another matter. Horace expressly forbids it in the *Ars poetica*,⁶⁷ but all this can be taken lightly. Under the pretence of laying down pedantic rules in an informal chat, Horace is busy inventing the very grotesque he forbids to others. Nor was it particularly unthinkable for artists to depict monsters of this kind; Lucian summons considerable enthusiasm for a picture of a family of centaurs (now lost) by Zeuxis. On the face of it, the artist had carried absurdity as far as possible: the female centaur suckles one of her children from a woman's breast, the other from a mare's.⁶⁸ But Lucian could still admire—or affect to admire—

the joining and fitting together of their bodies, by which the horse part is joined and bound together to the woman part, offer a gradual change, not an abrupt one.

Centaurs, satyrs and others

Two categories of mythical creature we have yet to touch upon: first, the centaurs, half-horse half-men; and second, the satyrs, who walk like upright man-faced goats for the most part. Not only are they rustic, wild, lawless and lustful, but they have a side that embodies wisdom as well. There is a very effective development of one of Chiron's contacts in a dialogue by Dio of Prusa (*Or.* 58). Achilles is presented in a childish tantrum, regarding archery as cowardly, and commenting adversely on the equine nature of Chiron himself: 'No, I don't like riding, and I don't like you either, creature as you are' (58.4). Chiron goes on to prophesy that

Achilles will stoop to mutilation of corpses and will be killed by someone he has not seen (i.e. by the archer Paris).

The most prolific of the canon of fantastic creatures are the satyrs, since they form an essential part in a whole dramatic genre, that of Satyric Drama. Although the latter is still only imperfectly understood, as only one complete play in the genre has survived, it is clear enough that the satyrs were cast in imaginative roles, and that they at least were capable of development where other monstrous creatures were not. A Syracusan bell krater (23508) shows a witch with some satyrs transformed into apes.⁶⁹ Their normal appearance is generally fantastic, with goats' horns, goatish or horse-like hindquarters, prominent phallos to emphasise their sexual preoccupations and generally drunken behaviour to emphasise their connexions with Dionysus. The ambivalence of their master Silenus again offers scope for fantasy; he combines droll drunkenness with wisdom and access to an essentially fairy-tale world.

Aside from the traditional creatures of myth and metamorphosis, we might note the general appetite for wonders and particularly wonderful creatures which obtains throughout antiquity. Lucretius already emphasises bizarre deformity (5.840–44):

Some were found bereft of feet, others in turn bereft of hands, also dumb without mouth and blind without faces, and bound by the adhesion of their limbs all along their bodies, so that they could not do anything or go anywhere, nor avoid evils, nor take up what was of use.

Such a work as Phlegon of Tralles' *Peri Thaumasiōn* (On wonders) may well have been typical of a genre of paradoxography which, for the most part, has left little more than titles and meagre traces. Aside from ghost stories and bizarre prophecies, there are collections of sex changes and hermaphrodites, finds of giant bones, monstrous births and rapid development. It is clear enough from Phlegon's selection, however, that he regards these *mirabilia* as a collection of curious *facts* rather than fictions, and that his audience might well have done likewise. As it happens, the very last subject in his collection is the report of an originally live centaur sent from Arabia to Egypt, where, however, it failed to adapt and died. (34.1ff.). It was then sent to Rome, where it had been put on show. It is clearly meant to convey that centaurs existed in reality, and the public exhibition at Rome may have been motivated by a 'nothing to hide' attitude. It is of course perfectly credible that a horse was found with what might have been presented, or imagined, as humanoid facial features, but inconceivable at least to us that such a specimen would also have had human forearms, except by some fraudulent prosthesis.

Perhaps the best example comes from Philostratus' bizarre *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. The author is almost as interested in the fauna and flora of India as in what Apollonius does there. But when he comes to describe the Phoenix and the porcupine, Philostratus' judgement fails him: an animal like this is plainly impossible.

Many tall and incredible stories are told, that it has four feet, with a head like a man's and the bulk of a lion, and that the tail of this creature puts out hairs

a cubit long and with the sharpness of thorns, and that it shoots them like arrows at its hunters.

But tradition has long hallowed the Phoenix, and in contrast to the martichora here described, it can safely be taken for granted—on the unimpeachable authority of the Indian brachmanes!⁷⁰

Conclusions

There is a considerable seam of fantasy in the various materials incorporated into Aesopic fable; it is at its richest where animals are credited with human education and particularly rhetorical effusiveness, whether in boastful mock-Epic speeches or sophistic display. The creative culmination was reached relatively early, in Old Comedy. The traditional canon of monsters tends to be less susceptible to development; there is not much for the chimaera to do other than be slain by Bellerophon. The wondrous creatures of India and elsewhere are, if anything, even more stereotyped; one can do little more than debate their existence.

Notes

- 1 For talking birds in antiquity, Pliny the Elder *NH* 10.117.
- 2 For useful introduction to the fable as a genre, see now Holzberg (2001; English Translation 2002). Magisterial treatment in van Dijk (1997).
- 3 For example Hermogenes on *mythos*: pp.2f. Rabe; Kennedy (2003), 74f. For the comic aspect of simians, Beard (2014), 160–167.
- 4 With a pun on *corocotta* and *choerococta*, in which the corocotta (hyaena) is seen as a talking pig rather than a laughing dog: Anderson (1980), 57f. Commentary by Bott (1972).
- 5 *Batrachomuiomachia* 9–99, cf. 384 Perry.
- 6 *Michigan Papyrus* 6946.
- 7 Pseudo-Herodotus *Vita Homeri* (Allen p. 207); Suda 3.526.6–527.28 Adler (Allen p. 259).
- 8 This may have been based on the fight of pygmies and cranes in *Iliad* 3.3ff.
- 9 Phaedrus 4.19.
- 10 Phaedrus 1.2.
- 11 For Sumerian Fable collections, Kramer (1981), 124–131. On Aesop and Ahiquar, Kurke (2011), 176–185.
- 12 See further Perry (1965), xxix–xxxiv.
- 13 E.g. Babrius 77.
- 14 *Wasps* 894–1002.
- 15 *Birds* 199f.
- 16 Babrius 8.3; 9.
- 17 Babrius 12.7ff. The allusion is to the story of the punishment of Tereus.
- 18 Babrius 88, Gellius *NA* 2.29.
- 19 Babrius 74.
- 20 Babrius, *praef.* 2.
- 21 Phaedrus 1.2; a more elaborate telling than Chambry 66 (= Halm 76).
- 22 Babrius 18; Avianus 4.
- 23 Babrius 70.
- 24 Phaedrus 4.13.

- 25 Phaedrus 4.19.
- 26 Achilles Tatius 2.20ff.
- 27 Babrius 11.11f.
- 28 Catullus 3.3, 9, 11f.
- 29 Ovid, *Amores* 2.6.49–58.
- 30 *Moralia* 985D–992E.
- 31 *Moralia* 988CD; EF.
- 32 *Moralia* 991E.
- 33 *Gallus* 27.
- 34 *Gallus* 19f.
- 35 Apuleius *Met.* 4.8.
- 36 Apuleius *Met.* 3.29. For comic aspects of asses, Beard (2014), 178–184.
- 37 Apuleius *Met.* 6.28f.
- 38 Gellius *NA* 13.7.
- 39 Aelian *de natura animalium* 3.23; Smith (2014), 129ff.
- 40 *Muscae Encomium* 5–9.
- 41 *Muscae Encomium* 7.
- 42 *Georgics* 4.67–87.
- 43 *Batrachomyiomaquia* 260–266.
- 44 *Batrachomyiomaquia* 294–303.
- 45 Lucian, *Verae Historiae* 1.17.
- 46 Aristophanes, *Birds* 114–119.
- 47 Aristophanes, *Birds* 481–487.
- 48 Aristophanes, *Birds* 693–704.
- 49 Aristophanes, *Birds* 685–692.
- 50 Babrius, *praef.* 5ff.
- 51 Philostratus *VA* 5.15.
- 52 Philostratus, *Imagines* 1.3.
- 53 Babrius 141.
- 54 Apuleius *Met.* 9.42.
- 55 *Fabula* 179 Perry.
- 56 Phaedrus 3.3.
- 57 For monsters and monstrosity in Augustan poetry, Lowe (2015); on reaction to the monstrous, Felton (2012); for overall theory, Cohen (1996), 7ff.: by their alien nature, monsters serve to validate one's own civilisation; the minotaur would thus serve to discredit Minoan culture. On the Dragon Myth and Dragon Slayers, Ogden 2013 A and B.
- 58 *Frr.* 57, 61 Dielz-Kranz.
- 59 Lucretius 5.891–906.
- 60 Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* 2.24.
- 61 *Iliad* 11.36f.
- 62 Perseus and the *gorgoneion*: Ogden (2008), 34–37.
- 63 For development of the myth, Ogden (ibid), 37–40.
- 64 In Cohen et al. (1996), they are suggested as 'symbolic expressions of cultural unease', but we need to know more of their early history.
- 65 Philostratus, *VA* 6.19.
- 66 Xenophanes fr. 15 Dielz-Kranz.
- 67 Horace, *Ars Poetica* 1ff.
- 68 *Zeuxis sive Aetion* 4.
- 69 Sutton (1980), 17 suspects a scene from Aeschylus' lost *Circe*.
- 70 *VA* 3.45, 49.

4 Fantastic voyages, other communities

The voyage into the unknown offers by far the widest scope for fantasy. In the course of it, the author can plausibly insert any absurdity he likes, and he has Homer's *Odyssey* before him as a guide and 'authority', complete with man-eating cannibals, lotus-eaters, men turned into pigs and the rest; the folktale origins of such episodes have already been lost sight of, and in Homer they have already reached the highroad of literature.¹ Moreover, there are other elements naturally related to such materials: finding an ideal or utopian community such as Homer's Phaeacians on one's travels, somewhere in the region of the ends of the earth, and calling upon the consciously applied techniques of tall storytelling.² Utopias can, of course, occur in their own right, but the effect of fantasy is intensified when they are combined with some preferably bizarre means of getting there.

Travellers' tales

One notes the intertwining of travellers' tales in the *Odyssey* with the issue of tall storytelling, and the Homeric presentation is quite odd. Here we have a sequence of fantastic adventures which are told straight-facedly (though with a routine reticence in the fantastic details themselves) in Books 9–12, followed by a sequence of realistic travel narratives which are quite plausible but actually totally false, when Odysseus has to account for his presence as a suspicious stranger on Ithaca itself.

The repertoire was enriched in the fifth century BCE by accounts of genuine voyages of exploration, as in Herodotus 2–4; despite his serious purpose, the historian set the fashion for including evidence which he himself did not believe, and the bridge is thereby built from science into fantasy. The explorations incidental to Alexander the Great's expedition provided further material, and Egypt, Arabia, Persia and India are fixed as focal points for otherworldly places.³ In the *Alexander Romance*, soundings of the Indian Ocean become transformed into Alexander exploring the ocean in a bathyscaphe.⁴ But the real apogée comes in the prose ideal romances, where separated lovers act out their stereotyped adventures against an exotic and usually oriental background; the plot may serve as a framework for digressions on such topics as the nature of magnetic stones, the rhythm of the Nile floods or the properties of amorous plants,⁵ and protagonists

may even find themselves in the vicinity of the moon, as in the now lost *Marvels beyond Thoule* of Antonius Diogenes.

Once more, the theme is developed still further by parody, which can comfortably overlap with fantasy itself. Lucian's *Verae Historiae* has set out to go one better than the most outlandish of Ctesias, Iambulus or Antonius Diogenes combined; often, his nonsense will compress half-a-dozen predecessors into a single episode. Herodotus' Scythians and Megasthenes' Indians could be easily blended on Antonius Diogenes' Moon.⁶

There are a number of subsidiary themes which develop side by side with the voyage itself. Storm scenes are an essential digression in Epic from the *Odyssey* onwards. In Homer, the imprisoning of the winds in a bag has the flavour of folk-tale; Odysseus' crew open the forbidden bag and bring mischief on themselves.⁷ But in the hands of rhetorical poets, the element of fantasy is not to be lost. In Lucan's infamous Epic storm-scene,⁸ all the winds blow simultaneously, producing a calm sea where they cancel one another out! This might be dismissed as mere rhetorical bad taste, but it also illustrates how fantasy can break through the barriers of formal literature.

Somewhat neglected as a source of fantasy is the topos of the 'Ship of Fools'. As this theme did not receive its title until Brandt's *Narrenschiff* in 1494, it is easy to forget that the label could have been applied in antiquity. Plato used such a scenario to ridicule the amateurs in politics:⁹ a mildly deaf captain of the ship of state is bullied by a crew which does not believe in the value of navigation, and the result is a maudlin pleasure-cruise. This in turn has obvious rhetorical possibilities: Maximus of Tyre turned it into a contrast between two ships, the luxury vessel which is unseaworthy and sinks, and the modest craft which will reach port safely.¹⁰ Lucian develops it into a nautical topsy-turvydom: the ship of the universe is manned by Providence,¹¹ so that through the eyes of an Epicurean it has a golden anchor and a lead figurehead, the bottom is painted while it is unsightly above the waterline and Socrates is in the bilges while the effeminate Sardanapalus is a privileged passenger.

In antiquity, voyages above the earth had to rely exclusively on fantasy. Like dream narratives and sea voyages, this type can serve as a conveniently flexible framework. The writer may have his fun describing how his hero got himself airborne in the first place; he may encounter some familiar spirit in the air and provide a picture of the universe. After that, the scene is set for moralising or serious philosophical speculation. Flights above the earth are only very incidental in Homer, though men as soaring birds have their place in Lyric poetry, but Plato took the decisive step in the myths of the *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*.¹² In the former, the soul has to raise itself out of the hollows of unreality so as to attain a view of the real surface of the true earth, like a fish surfacing to look at the world above. In the *Phaedrus*, the soul is presented as a charioteer managing two unequal horses representing its rational and emotional parts, while the base earth is left behind. The motif is worked out even in comic soul-flights. As early as Aristophanes' *Clouds*, we have Socrates already aloft in his basket in order to purify his meditations, while in *Peace*, Aristophanes sends Trygaeus up to heaven to ask Zeus to restore the personified Peace to earth;¹³ in a kind of geographical limbo, he then

heads a squad of farmers to rescue the statue of Peace from the cave where War has imprisoned her, wherever that may be. In *Birds*, Pisthetairus and Euelpides are given a drug by the Hoopoe that will enable them to sprout wings,¹⁴ and the *Alexander Romance* caps all with the hero's attempts to reach heaven in a basket drawn by birds.¹⁵ In several of these fantasies, the moral is to the fore: Trygaeus tells the audience how wicked they seemed from above; Lucian's Menippus arrives on the moon and sees men cheating, lying and committing adultery on earth, before he compares them inevitably to a chaotic chorus or a swarm of ants.¹⁶

Again, the parodies provide more opportunity for fantastic detail. In *Peace*, Aristophanes' Trygaeus goes to heaven on a dung-beetle in a parody of Euripides' *Bellerophon*, while Lucian's Menippus has strapped on an eagle's wing and a vulture's.¹⁷ Exact and realistic details play specially important parts in moonshine. Menippus practises flying from the Athenian Acropolis and takes his bearings from the Colossus of Rhodes. Ovid's story of Daedalus and Icarus (not this time a parody as such) concentrates on the making of the wings and on the sympathetic detail of the child Icarus playing with the wax and feathers that will mean his downfall.¹⁸ Ovid adds the detail that country eye-witnesses who saw the flyers mistook them for gods; a Hellenistic mixture of humour and pathos often provides the right 'tone' for pure fantasy, with no moral or satirical intention. We have a brief extract, in Plautus' *Trinummus*, of spontaneous aerial nonsense for pure entertainment. A messenger arrives from Seleucia, Macedonia, Asia and Arabia (simultaneously!); his name stretches all day; he brings a despatch from Rhodanus on the Cecropian Isle; he had made a voyage to the head of the river that rises from under the throne of Jupiter (hard work in a fishing-boat against the tide); he saw Jupiter, but the god had gone to feed his slaves.¹⁹ Similarly in *Peace*, the arriving Trygaeus finds that all the gods have migrated beyond heaven, leaving only Hermes behind to do the menial task of managing the utensils.²⁰

Dionysus and the Pirates

One particular voyage acquires the elements of a set piece early on in Greek literature: the adventure of Dionysus' attempted kidnap by Tyrrhenian pirates and its consequences for the ship and its crew. The story is alluded to by Pindar,²¹ and the account in the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* may not be much earlier. A vase-painting by the Exekias painter depicts Dionysus reclining on board a ship whose mast is wreathed with a vine. It is possible that such a depiction engendered the myth, though the reverse process seems more likely. Dolphins on the sea are consistent with the story but are just as likely to be included without it.

All the elements are already here: Dionysus as a youth, on a headland; the pirates who try to kidnap him for ransom but cannot bind him, to the consternation of the pious helmsman, rebuked by the impious captain; the ship itself entangled in a vine and washed by wine; the god changed to a lion and introducing a bear; the captain seized by the lion and the crew jumping overboard and turning into dolphins. The events are described as *thaumata* that astonish the crew, but their transformation to dolphins is brief and matter-of-fact.

There is a substantial treatment in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (3.582–691). Instead of the Homeric Hymn's objective narration, we have the story presented as the first-person tale of Acoetes, the master of a small fishing boat, and in a specific context: his warning to Pentheus of Thebes not to meddle with so powerful a deity. In this treatment, Dionysus is implied to be younger, as well as epicene; he is found (appropriately) drowsy and unsteady with wine, but is recognised by the ship's master as superhuman even before any wonders have taken place. Bacchus intervenes as the specifically named crew quarrel, and they take him on the opposite course to his preferred destination of Naxos; the god pleads, but in vain. The fantastic aspects of the voyage are now developed: the ship is immobilised despite the efforts of the rowers; the tendrils entwine the oar-blades. As there is this time no wicked captain, there is no lion nor bear but the more typically Dionysiac tigers, lynxes and panthers. Then, crew members are described in varying stages of transformation, including their ringleader Lycabas, transformed as he begins to ask his neighbour what sort of monster he is turning into; the dolphins then engage in a playful dance.

Two later Greek prose treatments from the Second Sophistic explore further variation of detail and narrative viewpoint. The first of these belongs to Lucian's *Dialogues of the Sea-gods*. The dolphin who saved Arion of Methymna from the pirates explains that they are kind to men, having once been human themselves, but 'I blame Dionysus for beating us in his naval battle and then changing us, when he should only have forced us to submit, like all the rest'.²² The second occurs in the descriptions of paintings by the elder of the two Philostrati who produced such collections.²³ Instead of a single pirate ship transformed by Dionysus, we have two separate vessels: the conventional warship, equipped with a ram, monstrous eyes, grappling-irons and the rest; and a Bacchic ship as on a sacred embassy steered by Dionysus in person, with the thyrsus for a mast, a purple (i.e. wine-coloured) sail, rows of cymbals instead of shields and a golden she-leopard as the figurehead, which leaps unbidden against the enemy vessel. Dionysus laughs at the antics of the men still trying to deploy limbs no longer there as in Ovid, as once more they are caught in varying stages of transition. Here the presentation takes the form of an explanation to a ten-year-old boy of one in a series of pictures. The two contrasting ships are first of all described as they stand, as puzzling curiosities with minimal context; only with the description of the pirates' transformations does the actual event fully emerge.

Once more the appetite for marvels

Whether or not in the context of a voyage narrative, fantastic details from exotic lands point to an appetite for wonders recited or even merely listed for their own sake. Aulus Gellius records acquiring a bargain lot of such literature or sub-literature in a sale at Brundisium:²⁴

Now all these books were written in Greek: they were full of miracles and tall stories, things unheard of, and incredible; but the writers were ancient and

of no slight authority: Aristeas of Proconnesus and Isigonus of Nicaea, and Ctesias and Onesicritus and Philostephanus and Hegesias.

After quoting examples, he concludes (*NA* 9.4.12f.):

These and many more of the same kind I read, but when I wrote them down, I was weary of these unworthy writings, that furnish nothing to the enrichment of life, and nothing of use to it. And yet it pleased me to note something also which Plinius Secundus did not hear or read, but actually saw, in the seventh book of his *Natural History*²⁵...

Once again we have a hint of wonders presented as curious facts rather than creative fantasy.

Gellius' examples are drawn from what we might see as the canonic fare of paradoxography: cannibalism among the Scythians, the single eyes of the Cyclops-like Arimaspi, fast runners in the same region with feet turned backwards,²⁶ men from Albania whose hair turns white in childhood and who see better at night (i.e. albinos), or the notion that the Borysthenites fast every other day. Beyond this region, he reports dog-headed men as well as one-legged men who hop very quickly, to say nothing of feathered men in remotest India. Gellius' attitude is typical: a patronising scepticism about reports from faraway lands, coupled with a willingness to add a further marvel to the list nonetheless.

We can look back directly to the wonder-narratives in the *Odyssey* as recited by the hero to the apparently credulous Phaeacians about the Laestrygonians, the Cyclops and Circe, the Lotus-Eaters and Scylla and Charybdis to see encounters with unusual peoples and monsters as an ingredient of poetry. But side by side with Homer, there emerges an increasing awareness of remote lands and cultures contributed by travellers, geographers, proto-scientists and others, until a canon of writers emerges. Herodotus records Scylax of Caryanda as commissioned by Darius I to investigate the Indian Ocean coast as far as the Indus (4.44); Pliny the Elder cites Ctesias for a report of *Skiapodes* ('Shadow-feet') who stretch out on the ground in warmer weather to allow their feet to provide shade, while the *Otoliknoi* ('winnowing-fan-ears') have huge ears that function as parasols;²⁷ other creatures of a similar nature (as reported by Tzetzes) are soon to be augmented by the favourite villain of Indography, the Ctesias of the *Indika*,²⁸ which survives in part in the report by Photius. In addition to fabulous natural resources and long-lived inhabitants, we find the *Skiapodes* again, to which are added the already noticed *martichora*, a kind of back-firing porcupine with a tail capable of shooting poison darts.²⁹ To be sure, the diversity of creatures and animals did not go unnoticed by serious science: Aristotle explained the diversity of Libyan creatures by the interbreeding forced on animals at water-holes in a dry land, and Herodotus himself has reports not only of dog-headed men, but others described by the Libyans themselves as having eyes in their breasts.³⁰ But it was the impetus of Alexander's conquests and explorations in the East that acted as the greatest stimulus to 'Wonders of India'; authors later than Alexander, such as Megasthenes,

Nearchus, Deimachus and Onesicritus, continue the flow of marvellous information. Strabo accuses writers on India of deliberately mixing mythical with genuine information while pretending to purvey only the latter, with only Theopompus admitting to the use of myth.³¹ *Terateia* (wonderment) and *terpsis* (delight) are offered as the motivation of writers on *Indica*. Strabo singles out for particular distrust Deimachus and Megasthenes, with their Ear-sleepers, Mouthless men, Noseless men, One-eyes, Biglegs and backward-fingers, to say nothing of the Homeric battle between cranes and pygmies, which they have revived.³² All this coexists with an authentic tradition mediated through more responsible writers such as Onesicritus and Nearchus, down to Patrocles, Eratosthenes and Strabo himself. Strabo does take Alexander-authors to task for such excesses as displacing the Caucasus further east in order to exaggerate Alexander's own achievement.³³ But one notes that by book 15, Strabo himself has changed his priorities, admitting that information is hard to come by, that recent merchants' accounts can be unreliable. Onesicritus is now the arch-liar, as the 'admiral of wonders'.³⁴ After the point at which Alexander himself stopped, the River Hyphasis, Megasthenes invests his narrative with even more wonders.³⁵

The *Alexander Romance* blends catalogues of wonders with travel narrative, especially in the letters interspersed with conventional narrative, in particular those in the beta recension addressed both to Alexander's mother Olympias and his tutor Aristotle.³⁶ Typically, Alexander's bravery and curiosity cause him to ignore the warnings of others, so that he enters unknown regions and encounters the native peoples and creatures with mixed success and a good deal of fright and panic on his own part:³⁷

And in that wood there were men called Plantmen (*Phytoi*), twenty-four cubits tall, with necks one and a half cubits in length, and also with large feet; their arms and hands resembled saws. When they saw us they made a rush at the army. When I saw this, I was beside myself; I ordered one of them to be captured. When we rushed at them with howls and trumpet-calls they fled. We killed thirty-two of them, but they killed a hundred of our troops.

Alexander is sometimes forced to heed divine warnings. He is prohibited from collecting oil from trees that grew till midday then receded again; an invisible divinity whips the oil-collectors and threatens the army with dumbness if disobeyed. An alphabetic oracle prophesies Alexander's death after he has completed his thirtieth year.³⁸

Alexander's Quest for the Waters of Life appears in this section, when his cook discovers the magic waters but reveals the secret only when it is beyond Alexander's power to return and obtain some for himself.³⁹ The motif is at least as old as *Gilgamesh*. And Alexander has narrow escapes from his two most noteworthy and extreme adventures. When he is investigating the ocean floor in his bathyscaphe, his support team is attacked by a giant fish and the king himself barely escapes alive; while when riding in his basket drawn by giant birds to try to discover the ends of the earth, he is once again divinely warned to desist.⁴⁰

Some insight into the development of these fantastic materials can be sought in the rhetorical tradition. The first of the *suasoriae* assembled by the Elder Seneca deals specifically with Alexander's decision whether to sail the far Ocean. The king has to face⁴¹

strange and terrible forms, portentous creatures great even for the Ocean, nourished by its vast depth, light confounded with the deepest gloom and day interrupted with darkness, the very sea great in bulk and standing still, and either no stars or different ones. Such, Alexander, is the nature of things: after all things Ocean, after Ocean nothing.

Nor is Strabo by any means the end of all this; the Elder Pliny in the first century of the Roman Empire is able to produce portentous catalogues of wonders outside the scope of any Alexander narrative.⁴² The whole repertoire of marvels raises a basic question for the student of fantasy: to what extent are accounts of marvels for their own sake the result of perverted science, and to what extent the result of invention for entertainment? A serious geographer like Strabo will not hesitate to accuse his predecessors of purveying the element of diversion, but not every case is clear cut. Take the example of the gold-digging Indian ants in Herodotus. These are among the most natural targets for invention for pure entertainment, but it has recently been shown that rodents do indeed perform this function, and the lack of a local word to distinguish ant and rodent is enough to explain the oddity.⁴³ On the other hand, it is very difficult to catch a writer in the very act of deliberately inventing. Perhaps the closest we can get to the genesis of a 'wonder-tale' about a miraculous creature is the handling of the (perfectly genuine) dolphin in both Plinys. For Pliny the Elder, as the writer of the *Natural History*, it is simply a matter of record: a dolphin appeared at Hippo, gave swimmers rides, and recovered from an unsuccessful attempt to apply unguent; it is all straightforward reporting. Pliny the Younger, as well as offering much sympathetic and anthropomorphic detail, tells us that the author had heard about the marvel in the course of dinner-party conversation; he now writes to his friend Caninius Rufus, urging him to commemorate the dolphin in verse.⁴⁴ We do not find any trace of actual falsification, deliberate or otherwise, but we can see how easy it would be to develop the tale in a dubious direction from the context Pliny describes.

To sum up: voyages allow an unlimited license to fantasy, not least for their Heath-Robinson means of travel to the ends of the earth and beyond. Either one can bring the elements of a new society to the ends of the earth, or one can find some such society already established in its own right. It is to the latter we must now turn.

The Utopian tradition

Individual wonders are one thing, but the phenomenon of a remote and alternative society raises questions on a different scale. Aristophanes' Cloudcuckooland in *Birds* has acquired such a proverbial status that little attention is actually accorded

to the way its creator has constructed his illusion. He has already offered a myth to suggest that the birds predate both the world itself and the gods. Then the name: Pisthetaerus first suggests 'Sparta', predictably rejected by his friend Euelpides; in response to the birds' request for a title that is *chaunon* ('grandiloquent'), he then comes up with *Nephelokokkugia*, which is hailed as *kalon* and *mega*. It may have a touch of expansionism in the use of *kokkux* (cuckoo), but the choice of bird may just as readily have been chosen for the verbal jingle itself. Aristophanes refers to the place where the (imaginary) wealth of the braggarts Theagenes and Aeschines is stored in the clouds.⁴⁵ His foundation now needs a tutelary deity; Athena is naturally rejected in favour of the cockerel, and at this early stage the building of the city walls is already briefly indicated as in progress:⁴⁶

Come now, you get yourself airborne,
And lend a helping hand to the wall-builders.
Bring along the rubble, strip off and work the mortar,
Bring up the hod, fall off the ladder,
Station sentries; keep the fire hidden,
Run round with the alarm bell, and fall asleep there.
Send a pair of heralds, one up to the gods,
The other from above down to earth ...

Rapid response brings the usual crop of earthly impostors ready to lay claim to the new colony for themselves: a poet, an oracle-monger, a surveyor. The last, Meton, alludes to the town-planning:⁴⁷

I will measure, applying the straight rule, so that
The circle may be square, and in the middle
A market place, and streets leading up to it
Straight to the centre, like a star formation,
As although a star is circular, straight rays shine forth in every direction ...

Only after the existence of the city has been implied by this string of visitors do we have a messenger to announce that the building of the walls is now complete, and information is relayed to Pisthetaerus as to how various parts of the operation have actually been done. The walls are two chariots thick and 600 feet high:⁴⁸

From Libya some thirty thousand cranes
That had swallowed down foundation stones;
The corn-crakes fashioned them with their beaks;
Ten thousand storks would carry bricks,
And from below there carried water into the air
The lapwings and the other river birds;
—Who carried the mortar for them?
Hérons brought them in hods.
—How did they toss the mortar in?

This, my friend, they discovered a clever way to do:
The geese beat down their feet, and shovelled it into the hods.

In fact this may not be the first instance of literally building ‘castles in the air’: we have an enigma in the *Life of Aesop* in which the king of Egypt challenges the king of Babylon to build a tower in the sky. Aesop advises him to clip the wings of high-flying birds, put small boys on their backs and have them demand the bricks and mortar (which of course the king of Egypt will then be unable to provide).⁴⁹ This section of the text is related to the tale of the wise Ahiquar found in an Aramaic papyrus of the fifth century BCE, so that this element of the story may well antedate Aristophanes.

Resurrecting Atlantis

No less proverbial than Cloudeuckooland is Atlantis. When we think about the problems of explaining Plato’s accounts, we tend to think about what he himself says about it and leave it at that.⁵⁰ In the *Timaeus* and unfinished *Critias*, we are given an account, allegedly offered to Solon by Egyptian priests, of a lost civilisation, formerly a rival to the likewise lost ancient Athens and overwhelmed by flood in a sudden cataclysm all of 9,000 years ago. But in fact Atlantis is only one of a number of ancient ‘versions’ of a quasi-realistic description of Utopia; it is important to look at it in the context of a group of others in order to give ourselves some idea of the possible ways that an Atlantis story could have been conceived. Already in the *Odyssey*, we find the hero washed up on the island of Scheria ruled by the Phaeacian king Alcinous, who presides over a palace-culture with rich orchards and unfailing harvests, with rich gifts of metal objects for Odysseus himself,⁵¹ and whose people are a maritime nation, skilled in the handling of ships without steering oars and so supposedly magical. The placing of Scheria itself is characteristically vague. There is also at least the hint of cataclysm here too; a prophecy is duly fulfilled that if the Phaeacians help mariners like Odysseus, Poseidon will wall them in with mountains.⁵² Such places are allied to natural disasters; there has to be a plausible reason why they can no longer be found.

It is not perhaps till after Plato that we have a narrative sufficiently close to Plato’s own to underline the establishment of a type. Theopompus writes perhaps a generation or so later, and a Utopian scenario from him is quoted at some length by Aelian, a collector of that sort of information, in the second or third century CE.⁵³ Theopompus has Silenus saying to Midas that Europe and Asia and Libya were islands around which the ocean flowed in a circle, and that the only true continent was the one outside this arrangement. He described its size as beyond measure; it supported other animals of great size, while its men were twice our size and did not live for our lifespan but twice as long; it had many great cities and many different lifestyles, and its laws were the opposite to our own.

Two cities he described as greatest in size, completely different from each other, called Warville (Machimos) and Peacetown (Eusebes). The inhabitants

of Peacetown live in peace and in great wealth, and they take the fruits of the earth without plough or oxen, and there is no need for them to sow, and they live, said Silenus, healthy and free of disease and live their life with much laughter and pleasure. And they are so undoubtedly just that not even the gods disdain to visit them frequently. But the citizens of Warville are very warlike and are actually born with weapons, and are always fighting and enslave their neighbours, and this single city controls a great many nations. Their population is not less than twenty million. They die in some cases of disease, but this is rare, since the majority die in wars, struck by stones or wooden weapons. They are not wounded by iron. They have a plentiful supply of gold and silver; they value gold less than we value iron.

From such a description, we can extrapolate several characteristics. Clearly we have here an Atlantis-type narrative, though its geography is different. It describes a Utopian people in a populous, earthly, urbanised paradise. Whereas Plato's Atlantis is out in the ocean between Eurasia and the 'true continent', Theopompus' account seems to be a description of the 'true continent' itself. It might be suggested that this is actually in harmony with Plato's geography, since it purports to be set in semi-historical times, by which time Atlantis would of course have sunk. On the other hand, with all its vagueness, we might be tempted to see this as yet another view of Atlantis itself, and a particularly important one, since its presentation of Warville and Peacetown will remind us of the great conflict in Plato's Atlantis narrative between Atlantis and Athens.⁵⁴ However, this time it is as if the opponents of Atlantis, like Atlantis itself, are *outside* the pillars of Heracles.

A number of other Utopias follow in the wake of Theopompus, and their characteristics can be summarised more briefly. But there is a key change in the geographical balance itself: with the conquests and explorations of Alexander the Great, the preferred exotic location is not the Atlantic but the Indian Ocean.⁵⁵ The most important of these Utopia stories is the account of Panchaea by Euhemerus, the philosopher-companion of the early Hellenistic king Cassander.⁵⁶ Panchaea itself is set as a large island 'opposite Arabia', and said to be near another island that, in turn, is within sight of India. It certainly has what can best be described as Utopian décor: a marvellous range of wild animals including the elephant; an abundance of fruits; a priestly organisation, but one sacred to Zeus rather than Poseidon; and, most interestingly, a cultural affinity with Crete, whence its own god is said to have come. If this is identifiable with any real place, the only reasonable basis for it would have to be Ceylon; the name Panchaea is not itself entirely clear.⁵⁷

The plain that surrounds the temple (of Zeus Tryphylus) supports an abundance of all kinds of trees, not just those which bear fruit, but also others that are able to delight the eye. The plain has an abundance of huge cypresses and plane-trees and laurel and myrtle, as the site is fully supplied with springs of water. For near the precinct there rises from the ground a spring of sweet water so large that it becomes a river navigable by boats.

The Hellenistic prose-writer Iambulus,⁵⁸ less easy to date, has a strange country as well; he wrote a travel romance in which he himself is said to have travelled south from Ethiopia to a fabulous island where he stops for seven years. It has the specific peculiarity that its language has an alphabet of 28 letters and four forms of each, yet it is written vertically; the inhabitants of the island have divided tongues to carry on two conversations at once. There are double sets of hot and cold springs, inhabitants with no hair on any part of their bodies except their heads, a long life without illness and the practice of euthanasia by lying on a bed of soporific plants; they practise communism with regard to sex by sharing their children in common.

Such accounts could be rationalised in a number of ways. We could say, for example, that Greek travellers will start out with a very schematised view of mankind at the outset, with the assumption that primitive peoples are noble and have a specially pure sort of justice and that peoples which do not practise agriculture live in a privileged sort of paradise, and any reporters can combine this stereotype with anything they actually do find in the field. And in the Indian Ocean in antiquity, they will not have had to travel too far to find civilisation of some recognisable kind.

One central difficulty does seem to underlie some of the problems of locating these Utopias, namely the deficiencies of ancient maps and map-making and the consequent vagueness in dealing with any territories very far from the coastline of the Mediterranean itself.⁵⁹ But wherever and whatever such paradises may have been, their reporters set them there still. On the other hand, Atlantis, Plato claims, has actually been destroyed, and this is where catastrophe-theorists have stepped in.

One direction seems to me on the whole to be underexplored, that is, the relationship between the Atlantis myth and ancient Mesopotamian cultural roots. It is very easy to point to the similarity of the Flood myths as they occur in the Book of Genesis, the Epic of Gilgamesh and the story of Deucalion in Greek mythology.⁶⁰ It was plausibly argued in the 1970s that the Atlantis myth is just another variant of the Flood myth, where the gods routinely decide to punish mankind for its wickedness and allow a single survivor who escapes a flood.⁶¹ The name of Atlantis is itself based on the word Atlas; the survivor of the flood in one of the two Babylonian accounts is called Atrahasis. The phonetic distinction between Atrahasis-Atras and Atlas is very slim indeed. The parallel survivor of the flood is placed by the Gilgamesh epic at the edge of the ocean. He can only be reached by means of a ferryman, and he now enjoys immortality, so is he the first inhabitant of the island of Atlantis? Where, on the other hand, is the Atlas of classical mythology? He too is at the edge of the ocean.

There is a second connexion that has not been emphasised enough. This is the idea that the flood myth and its Atlantis legend are connected with a fourth or sunken continent. As readers of the Atlantis literature are aware, there has been a fanatical search for a sunken continent triggered by Plato's account. We might note that it is just after the Biblical flood that the three sons of Noah begin the division of mankind into three. Similarly in Theopompus: Libya, Europe and Asia

constitute three separate entities; part and parcel of the whole business is that it is tied up with the basic beginnings of geographical awareness.

One theory has tended to be the front runner when candidates are being advanced for Atlantis: the idea that Plato's Great Continent is really a kind of mythical extrapolation of Minoan Crete, severely disrupted by a volcanic eruption at nearby Thera in c. 1470 BCE, and never quite able to recover. It is conveniently the probable subject of a real war with Athens, symbolised in the rivalry between Theseus and Minos in the Minotaur legend. The argument runs that from the point of view of the Egyptian priests consulted by Solon, this would represent a great sea-power in the West within a reasonable historical memory, and Plato only needs to exaggerate to produce an obvious never-never land onto which he can impose Cretan characteristics. This may well be part of the story, but it certainly cannot represent the whole. For one thing, it is inconceivable that Crete had elephants; nor has Crete itself sunk lock, stock and barrel beneath the waves, even of the wrong sea!

But scholars and Atlantis-hunters alike have been so preoccupied in recent years with the Thera-theory⁶² that they have not looked nearly hard enough at Egyptian literature itself, the closest tradition to Solon's alleged source of information. If we were to do so, we should find a very engaging Egyptian traveller's tale known as the *Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor*.⁶³ The raconteur tells how, on a voyage southward from Egypt into the Indian Ocean, he was washed ashore on a tropical island. Its tutelary deity is a great snake, and the island itself is said to have everything; our mariner is able to take back to Egypt as a gift elephants' tusks, giraffes' tails, myrrh, frankincense and the like. What is more, he is told by his reptile host that this is the island of Ka, and that he need not try to find it again as it will become water. Not only is he a survivor, but so is his host; his family of fellow-snakes had already been burned up when a star fell from the sky.

This account should be particularly welcome to any Atlantis-hunter, from whatever quarter it comes. But it is more than that: it is a means to undermine the Thera-theory on important chronological grounds. This tale is from the earlier part of the Egyptian Middle Kingdom, which in any case ended around 1650 BCE; it is very safely earlier than the eighteenth Dynasty under which the Thera earthquake must have taken place. Egyptian literature, then, had a tradition of a rich, all-providing tropical land outside the Mediterranean which sank underneath the water *before* the 'accident' to Minoan Crete. It follows that the latter could not be the basis for all Egyptian accounts of a sunken island.

Once it has proved possible to set one's Shangri-La just outside the Mediterranean, it becomes possible to place it in ever more exotic locations such as the North Pole or beyond the moon. Nor need the citizens be near-ordinary humans, when they can be bald-headed men riding on three-headed donkeys—or some comparable absurdities. The opportunity par excellence to establish a comic Utopia of that sort comes in the work of Lucian. This author writes towards the end of the second century CE, more than five centuries after Plato's Atlantis, and he sets out not just to send up the idea of an earthly paradise and ideal state, but

also to parody the whole business of travelling to fantastic or Utopian places, as he himself lays down in his preface. One of Lucian's specialities is telling tall tales and sheer lying. Not only does fantastic travel lend itself to this kind of treatment, but Lucian was also in any case a quite consummate practical joker. We know of a joke he played on a famous philosopher of the day, in which he forged a spoof treatise in an antique dialect and attributed it to the ancient philosopher Heraclitus; his victim was taken in by the spoof and quite happily wrote a commentary on this forgery under the impression that it was the real thing.

In Lucian's *Verae Historiae*, this *pseudos* takes on a quite distinctive flavour, and Lucian seems to lose few opportunities to remind us that lying comes easily to him. He assures us in the preface that the only true statement he makes is that he is telling lies, and he makes occasional comments en route about other writers; Aristophanes, notorious for his own fantasies, is whimsically endorsed: 'And I remembered the poet Aristophanes, a wise and truthful man, and wrongly distrusted for his writings' (1.29); or again

Those who suffered the worst punishments were those who told lies in life, and those who wrote false history: among them were Ctesias of Cnidos and Herodotus and many others. As I saw them I had good hopes for the future, for I have never knowingly told a lie.

(2.31)

Since so many Utopian communities are set so far away, it seems not unreasonable that the ultimate ideal community should be set on the moon itself. Questions had been seriously raised by early Greek philosophy as to whether the moon was inhabited, and here is Lucian's answer:

What I observed during my stay on the moon that was novel and amazing, this I wish to mention. First of all they are not born from women, but from men: for they marry other men, and do not even know the word 'woman'; until the age of twenty-five each is a bride, and from that age a bridegroom. They do not get pregnant in the belly, but in the calf of the leg; for whenever conception takes place, the calf swells and later they cut out the offspring dead, but turning them toward the wind with mouths wide open they give them life. And it seems to me that the term belly of the leg comes from there, because on the moon the calf functions as a belly. I will tell you something even more amazing. They have a race of men called the treemen and they come into the world in the following manner. They cut out a man's right testicle and plant it in the ground, and from it there grows a fleshy tree like a phallos with branches and leaves; its fruit is acorns a cubit thick. When they come to fruition, they harvest them by digging out the men ... A man in their country is reckoned handsome if he is bald and without hair: long-haired men are abhorrent to them. But on the comets it is the opposite: they think long-haired people are handsome. For there were visitors on the moon who told us about them.

Unfortunately, Antonius Diogenes' *Marvels beyond Thule* has not survived to test Photius' claim that it was the chief source for Lucian; we only know that it did contain an episode set close to the moon.

No less striking is Lucian's discovery, when his ship is swallowed by a whale, that its insides contain a whole series of exotic communities of creatures, and that escape from the whale is only possible by burning it from within. Here is an analogue from Indian popular literature using an elephant instead of the whale:

The elephant seized her and swallowed her too. When she reached the elephant's stomach, she saw large forests, and great rivers, and many high lands; on one side there were many rocks; and there were many people who built villages there; and many dogs and many cattle; all was there inside the elephant; she saw too her own children sitting there ... she kindled a great fire. She cut the liver, and roasted it and ate with her children ... and it came to pass after a long time that the elephant died. The woman divided the elephant with a knife, cutting through a rib with an axe (all the animals and the woman herself get out).⁶⁴

Conclusions

There is ample scope for fantasy from an early stage of Greek travel-literature onwards; there is also scope for a great deal of variation in quality. Both Epic and Old Comedy build fantasy communities into classics of world literature; at the opposite end of the scale stands the irrepressibly popular, naive and ever-expanding *Alexander Romance*. At the end of travel literature stands the more static fantasy of a Utopia, be it on the moon or inside a monstrous animal. Time and again, we find the convergence of supposedly curious facts and deliberate fantasy; the distinction is not always easy to draw.

At this point, it is perhaps not out of place to draw attention to an ancient fantasy which has taken the best part of two millennia to appear. If anyone wonders what Herodotus would have made of Oxbridge, Sir John Beazley tells us in exquisite Ionic:⁶⁵

The Boubaloi are a race who inhabit the city of Oxenford: Bosporos in the middle of England, beside a great river, the Isis: the name they learned I suppose from the Egyptians. And they sacrifice to Isis, and have instituted a contest of boats. These are the finest of all the inhabitants of England, as I have heard from them, and myself am totally convinced of. And the sovereign will not do anything without putting the matter before the Oxonians first. They are Hellenes from Athens; the rest of the English are of mixed descent (*mixobarbaroi*): they are big and strong and good and beautiful. They never tell lies, considering it shameful, but they wear barbarian clothes.

Nonetheless I hear another *logos* from those who inhabit the city of Champriz (who venerate crocodiles, calling them *champsai*). They too claim to be the best in England, but they do not persuade me. For the Oxfordites are

Hellenes, and it is natural for Greeks to be superior everywhere. The inhabitants of Champriz cultivate rather the wisdom of the Egyptians.

If we can relate to the above tissue of elegant improbabilities, then we shall be well equipped to come to terms with its ancient predecessors.

Notes

- 1 For the folkloric aspect, D.L. Page (1956), 1–20 (the Polyphemus story); idem (1972), other tales.
- 2 On these Anderson (2007), 201–222.
- 3 See further R. Stoneman (2010), 6–90.
- 4 *Alexander Romance* 2.38; 41.
- 5 Achilles Tatius 1.17.1f.; Heliodorus 2.28; Achilles Tatius 1.17.3–5.
- 6 E.g. *Verae Historiae* 1.23–26.
- 7 *Odyssey* 10.1–76.
- 8 *Pharsalia* 5.597–612.
- 9 *Respublica* 488A–489A.
- 10 Maximus Tyrius *Or.* 30.3.
- 11 Lucian, *Iuppiter Tragoedus* 47–49.
- 12 *Phaedo* 109E; *Phaedrus* 246A.
- 13 *Clouds* 218–233; *Peace* 93–96.
- 14 *Birds* 654f.
- 15 *Alexander Romance* 2.41.
- 16 Aristophanes *Peace* 819–823; Lucian, *Icaromenippus* 15–19.
- 17 *Peace* 73–77; *Icaromenippus* 10.
- 18 *Icaromenippus* 10, 12; Ovid, *Met.* 8.189–200.
- 19 Plautus *Trinummus* 933–945.
- 20 *Peace* 196–202.
- 21 Fr. 236 Snell.
- 22 *Dialogi Marini* 5.1.
- 23 *Imagines* 19.
- 24 *Noctes Atticae* 9.4.2ff.
- 25 *Noctes Atticae* 9.4.12f.
- 26 Cf. Pliny *NH* 7.11.
- 27 Tzetzes, *Chiliades* 7.635.
- 28 For the marvels of Egypt and India in Aelian, Smith (2014), 147–178. In relation to Apollonius of Tyana, Anderson (1986), 199–226. A useful review of Eastern exotic lands and their contents in Romm (1992), 82–120; Campbell (2006), 112–132.
- 29 Ctesias' *Indica* in Photius *Codex* 72 .15 (martichora).
- 30 Herodotus 4.191.
- 31 Strabo 1.2.35. On the cultural context of Strabo, Dueck (2000).
- 32 Strabo 2.1.9.
- 33 Strabo 11.5.5–11.6.4.
- 34 Strabo 15.1.28.
- 35 Strabo 15.1.37.
- 36 Recension *B* 2.23–41.
- 37 Recension *B* 2.32.
- 38 Recension *B* 2.38.
- 39 Recension *B* 39, 41.
- 40 Recension *B* 38; 41.
- 41 *Suasoria* 1.1.

- 42 *NH* 7.21–32.
- 43 Herodotus 3.102.
- 44 *NH* 9.26; *Ep.* 9.33.
- 45 *Birds* 821–836. cf. *Birds* 1127, *Wasps* 324.
- 46 *Birds* 837ff.
- 47 *Birds* 1004–1009.
- 48 *Birds* 1136ff.
- 49 *Life of Aesop* 111; 116.
- 50 On Atlantis, among much Ramage (1978), Forsyth (1980); C. Gill *CPh* 72 (1977), 287–304; *Philosophy and Literature* 3 (1979) 64–78; and in Gill and Wiseman (1993), 38–87.
- 51 *Odyssey* 7.81–132; 13.10–19.
- 52 *Odyssey* 13.159–178.
- 53 *Varia Historia* 3.18; Theopompus fr. 75.
- 54 Cf. Timaeus 25B–D.
- 55 On this change as it affects the reporting of India itself, J. Romm (1992), 82–120.
- 56 Diodorus 5. 41.4f.; and cf. Ferguson (1975), 104–108.
- 57 Diodorus 5.43.
- 58 Diodorus 2.55–60.
- 59 On the changing conception of boundaries, Romm 9–44.
- 60 Useful collection of comparative texts in Dundes (1988).
- 61 Fredericks in Ramage (1978), 86–89.
- 62 The classic statement is still Marinatos in *Antiquity* 13 (1939), 425–439; cf. Luce (1969).
- 63 In M. Lichtheim (1973), 212–215.
- 64 J. Stewart (1905), 32f.
- 65 In an undergraduate Gaisford Greek Prize composition, *Herodotus at the Zoo*, (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1911), 14f.

5 Dreams, apparitions, horror

Dreams offer a frequent bridge between the real world and the fantastic,¹ and our surviving evidence belongs much more readily to the world of literature rather than to psychology. On this basis, one can conveniently dream the literary clichés one has simply read in books, whether in normal dreams or in day-dream fantasies. As early as Homer, dreams are already well on the way to becoming conventional. In Homer, they can themselves be personal messengers of the gods (not necessarily truthful ones), and so part of the inevitable divine machinery, as when Zeus sends an ‘evil dream’ as a false messenger to Agamemnon;² there is nothing fantastic about the dream itself. It takes the form of the trusted Nestor giving advice, but its intended effect is illusory: Agamemnon will not be able to take Troy that day, as the dream suggests he should.

Dream-sequences in Tragedy can expect to be ominous; the pièce de résistance here is Atossa’s dream³ at Aeschylus, *Persae* 176ff., where the queen describes the last and clearest of the troubled dreams she has had since the expedition against Greece began: two richly dressed women representing Europe and Asia had quarrelled and been yoked by Xerxes to his chariot; the former broke loose and toppled him, to be pitied by his father Darius; when offering propitiatory sacrifice, Atossa then sees a falcon tear a fleeing eagle. Moschus’ *Europa* uses the same two allegorical women to prefigure Europa’s kidnap to Crete but without the ominous outcome.

Old Comedy could produce fantastic dreams with a similarly free hand, and the fantastic tendencies of the genre in general can be readily realised in its handling of dreams. At the beginning of Aristophanes’ *Wasps*, the two slaves Sosias and Xanthias are able to compare their respective dreams,⁴ and abrupt surprises are the order of the day:

Xanthias: I dreamt that an absolutely huge eagle swooped down into the agora, and seized a bronze shield in its talons and carried it up to heaven, and then Cleonymus (a notorious thrower away of his shield, i.e. coward) dropped it ...

Not only does the eagle apparently change into (the substantial) Cleonymus, but the term *ripsaspis* (shield-thrower) puns on the shield, which turns into another kind of *aspis*, a snake. His companion Sosias fares similarly:

Sosias: I dreamt in my first sleep that a flock sat in the assembly on the Pnyx with staves and little cloaks, then I seemed to hear an all-welcoming grampus talking to them with the voice of a scalded pig ... then the foul grampus took a balance and weighed fat beef ... And I dreamt I saw Theorus sitting on the ground nearby, with a raven's head, then Alcibiades lisped to me 'You see? Theolus hath a waven's head ...'

This second dream entails a pun on *dēmos* 'fat' and 'people': hence the greedy demagogue Kleon is carving up the fat of the people, watched by a predator (*korax*, a crow, punned lispingly with *kolax*, a flatterer). The puns provide opportunities for the characteristic ambiguities of dreams.

Aristophanes can also offer his own description of disturbing nightmares.⁵

At the very start he (the poet himself) boldly engaged with the jagged-toothed creature with the most terrible beams of Cynna shining from its eyes, and a hundred horrid sycophants' tongues wreathed around his head, with a voice of a destructive torrent, with the stench of a seal and the filthy balls of a Lamia, the arse of a camel. Seeing such a portent he did not take fright and accept a bribe, but on your behalf still now he fights: he says that with him he took on the illnesses and fevers which by night strangled fathers and choked grandfathers, laying them down on their beds, sticking together objections and challenges and witness-statements so that they got up in a panic, many of them, and ran off to the Polemarch.

But the foremost among comic dreams comes in Aeschylus' parody of Euripides' monodies in *Frogs*:⁶

O dark-appearing blackness of the Night, what baleful dream do you send from the invisible world, the servant of Hades, with a spirit that is not a spirit, child of black night, a terrible horrific sight clad in black shrouds, looking murderous with black talons?

The dream turns out after pretentious invocation to amount to no more than 'Glyke has stolen the cock from my henhouse and done a bunk' (1346–1352):

I was to go out in the morning darkness, but my cockerel flew up in the air on the lightest tips of his feathers ...

The powers of darkness are summoned, culminating in Hecate herself, for nothing more ominous than the trip to Glyke's house to recover the stolen bird.

Aeschylus has here succeeded in drawing attention to the mixture of tragic pretention and sheer banality which arises from Euripides' attempts to bring tragedy down to earth, and there may well be more than a suspicion of sexual double entendre in the theft of the cock.⁷ Nor is this the only parody that has come down to us: Socrates was presented dreaming of Plato as a young swan in his lap that

flew off as a fully-fledged bird; a Hellenistic parody of the story has the bird as a crow that croaks and starts pecking his bald pate.⁸ Nor are comic fantasy-dreams excluded from the more sober world of New Comedy, as when the hero's father dreams the plot of the *Mercator* but in animal terms of goats and a monkey.⁹

A dream foretelling the future may simply give an author a chance to 'arrange' the future in more colourful terms in advance. When Habrocomes in Xenophon of Ephesus' novel *Ephesiaca* is wooing Anthia, he dreams that he is a stallion pursuing a mare, and that he resumes human shape on finding her.¹⁰ There is more literary convenience here than latent sexuality; Greek romances were not written by hack rhetoricians for nothing. Often, too, fantastic dreams are the projection of an author's literary vanity. In Aelius Aristides' interminable dreams, the dominant figure is Asclepius, assuring all and sundry that Aristides is the greatest orator and will soon be even better, while Lucian, the successful lecturer, claims to dream that *Paideia* in person had taken him up to the skies in her chariot.¹¹

Two versions of dreamland

It is tempting to develop a wider imaginative context into which to set the working of all such dreams. Two very carefully worked fantasies offer frameworks for dreams on the grand scale by envisaging the whole apparatus of the dreams themselves:¹²

Close to the land of the Cimmerians is a hollow mountain with a cave that stretches far back, the home and innermost shrine of sluggish sleep: Phoebus is unable to approach it with his rays as he rises, or at mid-day or at sunset; clouds mixed with darkness are exhaled from the ground, and the twilight of shadowy light. Nor does the guardian bird there call forth the dawn with the songs of his crested head, nor do anxious hounds break the silence, nor the goose that is wiser than hounds. No wild beast, no flocks, no branches move the breeze, nor does the hubbub of human tongues give forth a sound. Mute silence dwells there; but from the rocks far below flows the stream of Lethe-water through which it invites sleep with the sound of the pebbles against the waves. Before the doors of the cave the flourishing poppies bloom, and unnumbered grasses, from whose milk Night collects and spreads its dampness though the dark regions. There is no door in the whole house, so that it does not give forth any creaking from the turn of a hinge; there is no guardian at the threshold. But in the middle of the cave stands a lofty couch of ebony, feathery, soft, dark in colour, covered with a dusky covering; here sleeps the god himself, his limbs relaxed in their languor. Surrounding him on all sides are vain dreams lying, in imitation of various shapes, as many as ears of corn at the harvest season, or as a wood bears trees, or the shore line casts forth the sand ... (633ff.) But father Sleep rouses from the horde of a thousand sons Morpheus, a fashioner and pretender of the human form: no other is more skilled than he as he expresses a man's walk and expression and the sound of his voice, also the clothes and the words each man uses; but he mimics only men, while another becomes beasts and birds, or a snake with its long body.

The gods call him Icelos, the throng of mortals call him Phobetor. A third too has different skills: he adopts earth and rock and water and trees—whatever has no life, of all those things he adopts their form. These forms are accustomed to show their faces to kings and leaders, others haunt the people and the lower orders. Father Sleep passes them by, and chooses from among his brothers Morpheus to fulfil the request of Thaumás' daughter (Iris), and once more relaxed in soft languor he lays down his head and lets it settle on his lofty bed.

A second version of the characterisation of dreamland occurs in Lucian,¹³ this time with the added 'authentication' that the author has been able to explore such a place for himself:

And after a little while there appeared near at hand the Island of Dreams, faint and difficult to make out. In itself it had a dream-like quality; for as we drew near it would retreat a little, shrink a little, and go further away. But we eventually overhauled it, and sailing into the harbour of Sleep, as it is called, we disembarked in late afternoon, near the ivory gates, where the temple of the cock is. As we travelled into the city we saw many dreams of all kinds. But first I want to speak of the city, since no-one else has described it, and Homer, the only one to mention it, has not wholly accurately pictured it.

Lucian establishes a bridgehead of credibility into the dream; apart from the general vagueness and elusiveness 'proper' to dreams, he is able to fix two precise locations almost casually, but is careful not to multiply such precision right away. The reference to Homer is somewhat misleading: the latter does not deal with such dreams as being on an island but simply has Penelope refer to the Gates of Horn and Ivory. By coming through the Ivory Gates, he is coming through the route of the false dreams in Homer's account.¹⁴ It is now time to multiply the allegories: Lucian gives his dream-town suitably somnolent names for its river and two springs. Only then does he 'correct' Homer by adding the names of two other gates, iron and earthenware, through which the nightmares have to pass. Right after this 'correction' we encounter the already established figures Night and the Cock, only now with the unobtrusive addition that they are the island's principal cults. Sleep himself as the ruler is now accorded suitable attendants, and we have more analogical details: a spring and temples of truth and untruth, a dream-interpreter Antiphon and social differentiation between the dreams themselves.

Some dream interpretation

The fantastic element in literary dreams often consists in a very obvious metaphorical anticipation of coming events, relatively rarely embellished beyond the minimum; thus Penelope in *Od.* 19.536–550:

I have twenty geese at home. They come from the water to eat grain, and I feel better when I see them. But a great eagle with curved beak came from

the mountain and broke all their necks and killed them; and they lay together in the halls, while the eagle ascended into the shining air. But I wept and wailed in my dream, and around me the Achaean ladies with their beautiful tresses, pitifully crying because the eagle killed my geese; but the bird came back and sat down on a jutting roof-beam, and with a human voice spoke to restrain me: 'Take heart, daughter of far-famed Icarus. Not a dream but the happy truth, which will be fulfilled: the geese are your suitors, but I am the eagle. As I was, now I have returned as your husband, who will mete out an unseemly fate to all the suitors.

While the interpretation seems obvious enough, the metaphor is not actually as appropriate as it might have been; Penelope has affection for the geese, and they are a natural part of the estate. While the contrast between geese and eagle is appropriate, Homer has not supplied some creature that is parasitic on the household (a plague of rats or the like), but dreams belong to a world where familiarity is more important than literary sophistication or theories of propriety.

Penelope alludes to 'two gates of unsubstantial dreams: the one wrought in horn, the other ivory. Those then that have come through the sawn ivory, are vain'.¹⁵ Servius took Virgil's purpose in letting Aeneas and the Sibyl depart through the ivory gate¹⁶ to be his way of indicating that all that had preceded in the Underworld was false, an interpretation which modern commentators have refused to accept.¹⁷ All that is really needed is that *some* qualification is necessary; truths about the life beyond can only be expressed in some mythical way.

A standard feature of real dreams is the abrupt transition from good fortune to ill by some apparently arbitrary shift. This is well caught in Alciphron's *Letters of Parasites* 23.2-4:

In my dream I seemed to be a handsome youth, and not just any one, but the famous lad from Ilium, the smooth-bodied very lovely boy, Ganymede the son of Tros, and that I had a crook and a pan-pipe with a Phrygian head-dress and was looking after my flock on Mount Ida. But suddenly a huge eagle with curved claws, with a fierce gaze and a curved beak, took me up in his talons from the rock where I was sitting, and lifted me into the air and pressed on toward the heavens; then as I was about to touch the gates guarded by the Hours, I fell, struck by a thunderbolt, and the bird was no longer the great eagle from aloft, but a vulture with a nasty stench, and I was myself, Limeterus (Hunger-Gut), without a stitch, as if I were about to have a bath or enter a wrestling-match.

A similar rude awakening awaits Lucian's poor cobbler Micyllus, roused in the middle of a dream in which he has inherited a fortune by the crowing of his cockerel.¹⁸

In the case of the second-century sophist Aelius Aristides, we have a unique diary which convincingly claims to contain reports of the author's actual dreams. The events narrated and the nature of the dreams strongly suggest that Aristides' claims are as close to authentic as we could possibly hope for; he is as close as

we are likely to get to an ancient patient on the psychiatrist's couch or, rather, an incubating patient in a temple of Asclepius, reporting his dreams to temple officials, doctors and the like.¹⁹ It is routine for him to dream of associating with the joint Emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, with whom he seems to form part of a mutual admiration society. There is much more: Aristides dreams of encountering Athena, or even of being both Odysseus and Telemachus;²⁰ or again he is inspired by Homer's presentation of Odysseus addressing Achilles as he addresses the Emperor and agrees to provide a larger audience;²¹ or passing through Alexandria, he hears schoolchildren reciting verses of his own in honour of Asclepius;²² or he is to declaim in the manner of Socrates, Demosthenes and Thucydides. He is to go to the temple Stoa at the theatre and offer the first fruits of his improvisations and competitive orations; or, after being recognised for his orations at the hearth of the Temple of Olympian Zeus, he finds in the garden of Asclepius before his ancestral home a tomb he is to share with Alexander the Great; he is suitably satisfied that both have reached the summit of their respective professions!²³ Or again, Plato appears in his room and asks for advice on how to write his letter to Dionysius.²⁴ There is another dream in which a friend, Lucius, persistently compares Aristides to a combination of Plato and other writers, and he sees a temple of Plato himself;²⁵ or he has a visit from Sophocles, and asks him the whereabouts of his 'brother' Aeschylus, only to find that as he left the building with the poet, a contemporary sophist slipped and lay on the ground;²⁶ or he is honoured by the emperor Hadrian in the court of the Temple.²⁷ Even more than in the case of his contemporary Lucian, he seems to dream dreams that associate him with the very heights of *Paideia*, and his dreams make no distinction between the great writers of the past and the elite of his own day, including, of course, himself.

Several writers list typical subject-matter of dreams. It is instructive to compare Lucretius' list²⁸ from the first century BCE to the checklist offered by Ausonius at the end of antiquity:

The minds of men, which produce great outcomes in proportion to great effects, do often perform the same things in their sleep. Kings conduct sieges, are taken prisoner, join battle, and raise a shout as if being slain—all on the very same spot. Many fight to the death or give out groans in their pain; and as if in the jaws of a panther or a savage lion fill all with great cries ... many speak of great matters in their dreams and have often confessed their own guilt; many meet their deaths and are terrified as if they throw themselves headlong to the ground and captured in their minds through their dreams scarcely return to themselves, disturbed by their bodies' turmoil. (The thirsty have mirages, bed-wetting occurs when boys imagine themselves relieving themselves, adolescents have wet dreams ...)

Ausonius²⁹ offers a similar catalogue, of which the beginning is lost:

<...> or earthbound monsters combined with sea-monsters, till they are dispersed by the purifying east and the clouds disappear in thin air. One moment

the courts, one moment the lawsuits, now the spectacle in the wide theatre is seen; and squadrons of horse I endure as they massacre brigands; wild beasts tear my face or I am cut to pieces with a sword in the bloody arena. I step as a sailor through the sea that wrecks ships and cross the straits with a bound and flit on sudden wings above the air. And I suffer unspeakable loves and disgraceful amours in the night and embraces in dreams that are the stuff of tragedy. But there is escape, as often as sleep is broken by shame and the mind freed from foul imagining stays awake. Then the hand free from guilt feels the whole bed; the blame of a guilty couch shrinks away, and as sleep recedes the charges diminish. I see myself applauding as one of a triumphal crowd; or again dragged disarmed among captive Alans; I gaze on the temples of the gods and sacred thresholds and gilded palaces, and seem to lie in Tyrian purple and next recline carousing in smoky eating-places.

Both poets choose to mention the exploits of kings, and both mention people torn by wild beasts; Ausonius seems more concerned over shameful amours; the lost beginning of his poem hints at hybrid monsters, but without context.

A special case: Artemidorus' *Oneirocritica*

Some dream materials in a handbook context are also relevant to the themes of literary dreams. The second-century CE dream collector Artemidorus of Daldis assembles five books of supposedly authentic dreams and interpretations, many highly suspect, and warns that the same dream dreamt by different individuals in different circumstances will prefigure different outcomes, a state of affairs which of course allows a great deal of latitude to the dream interpreter. Some of the dreams at least will doubtless have been genuinely dreamt and some no doubt fulfilled in the manner described. But Artemidorus has built in some escape routes: it is not much consolation to find that a dream may prefigure a certain outcome, or again it may signify the opposite, whether or not because some additional factor is supposedly involved:³⁰ 'I knew a ship-owner who dreamt that he had lost the divine statues set up on the ship, and then he was very much afraid and thought the dream signified ruin. But on the contrary, it turned out well. For having acquired a great deal of merchandise, he paid his debts to the creditors who held the boat as surety, and he did not have any longer people to hold back the boat as a guarantee'.

We can test the author on some clearly fantastic situations to see how he proceeds:³¹

To dream that one flies, rising a little from the earth and remaining upright, is good for the person who has had this dream. The more actually that one distances oneself from the earth, the more one rises above those who march below; now we term always those more highly elevated the richer. It is good on the other hand that that does not happen in your home country: that indicates an actual emigration, since your feet do not remain on the earth.

There is considerable interest in the interpretation of dreams of impending death, by any one of a number of means:³²

To dream that one descends into Hades and sees the things reckoned to be there: for those who are fortunate and live a life of their choosing, that prefigures lack of achievement and harm, for the inhabitants of Hades are inactive, without movement. For those on the other hand who are in fear, concerned, or in pain, that prefigures absence of care and pain: for the inhabitants of Hades have no chagrin nor any cares ... And if someone dreams that he comes back from Hades, he will return from abroad to his homeland; if he does not come back, that means he will die abroad.

Dreams of Perpetua

The four dreams of Perpetua, the early Christian martyr (d. 203CE), form part of a martyrology, an account of the events leading to her condemnation *ad bestias*. The girl is hauled up a long ladder by her spiritual mentor Satyrus, as she treads on a serpent below the ladder and negotiates the threatening objects attached to the rungs. She is welcomed at the top by a white-robed figure, no doubt that of Christ as the good shepherd. The overall interpretation would naturally suggest the present sufferings of the martyr before her reception in a glorious after-life. A second and third dream present her brother Deinocrates, who had died of a cancer of the face, as a filthy figure unable to drink from the raised parapet of a pool, then purified and able to drink from a lowered parapet and an inexhaustible golden vessel. The fourth vision, from the day before the encounter in the arena, has Perpetua dreaming of being in the arena, stripped and changing sex, then pitted in a contest against an evil Egyptian, whom she successfully defeats in a wrestling-match, to receive a green bough with golden apples.

None of the four visions falls outside the normal vocabulary of Christian images. The first has a look back to Jacob's dream of a ladder in Genesis 28, but hardly depends on it; the middle two dreams use the normal ingredients of a miracle cure; while the last falls back on Pauline imagery of a contest ('I have run a straight race ... I have finished my course'). It is possible to argue either side of the case that the materials belong to a genuine set of dreams (where the dreamer is preconditioned by the Christian images suggested), or that it is manufactured by a third-party Christian propagandist and simply attributed to Perpetua, or indeed some combination of the two.

Day-dreams

A chapter on dreams must include a mention of day-dreams, which are much less problematic than their counterparts in ordinary sleep. One specialist dream-fantasy embodies a folktale theme: the idea of a cumulative day-dream where the dreamer heaps hope upon hope until he loses everything as he is forced back down

to earth. Examples include the slave Gripus' speech in Plautus' *Rudens*, plotting the career he will have thanks to the contents of the trunk he has just found.³³ Such dreams are the normal domain of the moralist rather than the psychologist, and while generally illusory, they are less likely than ordinary dreams to be incoherent and fragmentary. We have a trio of such dreams in Lucian's *Navigium*, as three of Lycinus' friends become carried away with the vanity of human wishes, and in effect indulge in a day-dream competition on a stroll from the Piraeus to Athens. The first, Adimantus, dreams that he owns a huge grain-ship that has put in at the Piraeus, and that its cargo has turned to bullion; and that further he can indulge his amours with an Egyptian slave-boy aboard the ship. The general structure of the dream-wishes is that of 'castles in Spain'. Lycinus restrains him with the advice that his ship will sink.

The second day-dreamer imagines himself outdoing the conquests of Alexander the Great by starting with mere brigand beginnings and going on to conquer the Persian Empire in the same way, assigning subsidiary commands to his colleagues; once more, Lycinus has to remind him of the vulnerability of his over-ambitious schemes and opt out of his imperial designs. The third dreamer sees himself as possessing magic rings like Gyges and able to subvert even the functions of Providence itself in his arrogance:³⁴

And further I should easily find out the nature of the stars and the moon and the sun itself, without suffering the heat of its fire, and most pleasant of all, on the same day I should announce the name of the Olympic victor in Babylon and after breakfasting in Syria, as it might be, I should have dinner in Italy ... And all in all I should make human life my plaything, I should make all things my own and seem like a god to everyone else.

Lycinus has once more a suitable put-down:³⁵

Did you see any other man already in his dotage among all the nations you flew over so far out of his mind, riding on a tiny ring, able to move whole mountains with the tip of his finger, the darling of everyone, even though bald and snub-nosed?

Part of the mechanism of the three day-dreams is the dreamer's design of outdoing his fellow-dreamers by increasing the level of fantasy which enables him to gain the gains of his rivals as only a part of his own grand design. There is once again a strong flavour of the folktale of the Three Wishes about the structure.

Apparitions

From dreams (especially personified dreams) there is an easy transition to ghosts and apparitions, and the flourishing industry of novella relating to them.

Aristophanes' *Frogs*³⁶ offers a good illustration of an Empousa in action when Dionysus and his slave are trying to find their way in the Underworld:

Xanthias: ...I hear some sort of noise—
Dionysus: Where is it? Where is it?
Xanthias: It's coming from behind—
Dionysus: you get behind!
Xanthias: It's in front now!
Dionysus: you get in front!
Xanthias: By Zeus, I see a huge monster!
Dionysus: What does it look like?
Xanthias: terrible. It's every sort of shape.
Just then a bull: And now a mule: and then

The ripest young girl—

Dionysus: Where? I'm off to her ...
Xanthias: It's not a girl anymore. Now It's a dog —
Dionysus: It must be Empousa!
Xanthias: Well, its face at least is all on fire ...
Dionysus: And has it a copper leg?
Xanthias: Yes, by Poseidon; and the other's of dung
Dionysus: Where can I be off to?
Xanthias: And me!

The Empousa's chief characteristic here is its ability as a shapeshifter, with the added connotation of a bogey-man, useful to expose the timidity and opportunism of Dionysus himself.

Literary dreams have a habit of producing good stories that threaten to lose the air of inconsequence we might expect from genuine dreams, as in the following anecdote cited by Valerius Maximus:³⁷

A woman from Himera thought she went up to the sky in her sleep, and there, as she did the rounds of all the gods she noticed a powerful man of blond appearance, and a freckly face, bound in iron chains, and lying at the throne and feet of Jupiter. When she asked the young man who had served as her guide on her heavenly round who this was, she heard that he was the dreadful fate of Sicily and Italy, and once free of his bondage he would be the source of destruction for many cities. She spread word of her dream the next day ... when this was made known to Dionysius (as tyrant) it gave him cause to execute the woman.

No less effective as a fantastic ghost story is the celebrated tale of two Arcadians:³⁸ they stay overnight in Megara, one in a private house, the other in an inn. The former dreams the latter is entreating him to save him from death at the hands of the

innkeeper. He responds, but does not carry through his rescue. Then the ghost of the friend appears again, this time already murdered by the innkeeper, and begs for burial and revenge, indicating that his corpse will pass through the gate hidden under a pile of dung. This time the body is found and the innkeeper brought to justice. The knowledge of where the corpse is hidden serves to ‘prove’ the existence of ghosts themselves.

Two versions of the unburied corpse

A useful approach to teasing the fantastic from a simple ghost-story is to contrast two versions of the same tale, the one matter-of-fact, the other the reverse. The Younger Pliny recounts a ‘haunted house’ story to a friend to ask about belief in ghosts; the report he offers is as follows:³⁹

To begin with, there was the silence of night, just as everywhere else; then the rattle of iron and the moving of chains. (The philosopher Athenodorus) did not look up or stop writing, but shut the noise out of his mind, and closed his ears. Then the din grew greater, and now was heard as if in the entrance, now as if within. He looked back, saw and recognised the figure described to him. It stood and nodded as if summoning him with its finger. For his part he motioned with his hand for it to hold on a little, and again settled to his tablets and pen. The ghost rattled its chains around the head of the figure as he wrote. He looked round again and saw it beckon as before; without delay he took a lamp and followed. The ghost moved slowly as if heavy with chains. After it disappeared in the courtyard of the house, it suddenly went down and left its companion. He collected grass and leaves and placed them as a signal at the spot.

This can be compared with the version in Lucian⁴⁰ (The philosopher Arignotus is speaking):

When I heard this I took my books—I have a great number of Egyptian ones on such subjects—and arrived at the house in the early watch of the night, although my host tried to put me off and all but restrained me when he heard where I was going, into disaster with open eyes as he supposed. I took a lamp and went in alone; I put down the light in the largest room, sat down on the floor and started reading at leisure. The ghost set upon me supposing he was taking on one of the crowd and expecting to scare me as he did the others: he was an uncouth long-haired fellow, blacker than night. And he came at me and made an attempt, attacking me from all sides to get the better of me, and now turning into a hound, a bull or a lion. But I employed my most blood-curdling curse in Egyptian and drove him by this means into a corner of the dark house. And noting where he went down, I slept the rest of the night.

The first version is carefully focused on the observations of the exorcist, whose actions are kept in the third person. There is no attempt, given the subject-matter, to scare or terrify the reader, and every effort is made to exclude anything that could distract the observer. Lucian's take, by contrast, seeks to glorify the exorcist and show him as a boastful operator who is trying to get the better of the ghost, rather than helping him to be laid to rest at last. The metamorphoses of the ghost serve no useful purpose other than to enhance the feat of the exorcist.

Horror

Horror is a natural ingredient of fantasy. A substantial proportion of fantastic situations in antiquity tend to exploit the horrific and grotesque possibilities which lie beyond the normal range of human experience. One such possibility, which is theoretically possible but rare in civilised human contexts, is cannibalism, and one notes the perhaps disproportionate frequency of the subject on the highroad of ancient literature. The two extremes of this same theme can be seen in the *Odyssey* and in Petronius' *Satyricon*. The one-eyed Cyclops makes a bargain with Odysseus; he will give the hero a gift in return for more wine. After he has drunk the wine, he tells Odysseus that the gift is for him to eat Noman (Odysseus) last of all.⁴¹ Petronius' treatment of cannibalism ties it into Roman moral satire: Eumolpus bequeaths his (imaginary) wealth to his legacy-hunters—on condition that they eat his dead corpse, an offer on which he is actually being taken up as the fragment ends.⁴²

Cannibalism, then, is a fruitful source of horror; it lies close to the edge of normal Graeco-Roman experience and exercises a corresponding fascination. Juvenal describes an incident in contemporary Egypt and accuses rioters of cannibalism, not without characteristic relish.⁴³ The *Odyssey* had already probed the limits of horror and realism. The Cyclops washes down Odysseus' companions with pure milk; next time round, he washes them down with wine supplied by Odysseus. They casually discuss the vintage of the world of giants and the world of men, before the Cyclops vomits wine and limbs together.⁴⁴ One might reflect that the description of the Cyclops' cannibalism takes up a good deal more space than the fact that he has only one eye, a detail which emerges in the *Odyssey* only by implication.

Cannibalism, then, has been implanted in Greek literary consciousness at an early stage. But whatever the literary circumstances, it is tempting to underscore the bizarre of the act by some means or other. There are two other mythological instances of cannibalism which recur in Graeco-Roman consciousness, and in a different set of circumstances: where a victim contrives that his enemy should unknowingly be made to eat his own offspring. This happens both in the story of Tereus and Procne and in that of Atreus and Thyestes, the former itself possibly conceived as a precedent for the latter.

Ovid, for his part, was able to process such a theme in a characteristic way. When Tereus has eaten his own child, served up by his wife in revenge for the

rape of her sister, this is no more of the myth than a tragedian would present as a matter of course, but Ovid goes on:⁴⁵

Tereus himself sitting loftily on his ancestral throne, eats and collects his own flesh and blood in his stomach and such is the darkness of his mind that he says, 'Summon Itys here!' Procne is unable to conceal her cruel joy and already desiring to bring forth the news of her own disaster she says 'the boy you are asking for you have within'. Tereus looks round and asks where he is; when he called and called a second time, Philomela leapt forth with her hair dishevelled from the mad slaughter and thrust into his father's face the bloody head of Itys, nor at any time other than this would she have preferred to be able to speak and testify to her joy in appropriate words. The Thracian thrusts back the tables with a great shout, and summons the snake sisters from their Stygian depths and now, if only he could, would have cut back his breast and removed the dire meal and vomited the remains he had swallowed.

Seneca avails himself of a similar opportunity in *Thyestes* 976–1034, as one double entendre follows another in describing the relationship to the remains he has just eaten.

Juvenal's fifteenth satire sets out to link a number of such instances together as themselves fantastic occurrences which nonetheless fall short of the reality he claims to report (the Phaeacians would have been justified in disbelieving Odysseus' accounts of the cannibal Laestrygones and Cyclops; the Vascones were driven to cannibalism to secure survival in a siege⁴⁶):

One man stumbles through excess of fear; he trips and falls headlong and is caught. But so that one corpse should suffice for many, they cut him into many gobbets and morsels, and the triumphant mob ate the whole corpse, chewing even the bones. They did not cook it on a glowing spit or stew it in pots: it would have been tedious and slow to wait for a fire, when they were content with the raw cadaver ...⁴⁷

Juvenal completes the account first with a standard kind of rhetorical reflex: fire is to be congratulated for being spared the outrage of roasting the victim, and he insists that everyone enjoyed it down to the last morsel:⁴⁸

But the man who endured to bite the body never ate any flesh more eagerly than this. For in so great a crime do not ask or doubt whether only the first throat felt the pleasure; but the man who stood last in line, when already the whole corpse was consumed, drew his fingers through the earth for a taste of the blood.

Still more grotesque and fully characteristic of its author is the outcome of the tale of the accursed glutton Erysichthon. In Callimachus, he is merely reduced to beggary, having compulsively eaten through his whole fortune; but in Ovid,

despite the efforts of a metamorphosable daughter to raise the cash to feed him, he is reduced to self-cannibalism. As a result he is able to nourish his body by diminishing it:⁴⁹ *ipse suos artus lacero divellere morsu/coepit et infelix minuendo corpus alebat*: 'he himself began to tear apart his own limbs with his rending bite and wretch that he was nourished his body by reducing it'.

The novel *Leucippe and Clitophon* by Achilles Tatius adds to cannibalism the further frisson of sexual titillation. The heroine is captured in Egypt by a pirate band who must make a ritual meal of her insides in order to purify (!) their troupe. The reader is misled into thinking, as does the hero, that this ritual actually takes place, and the hero Clitophon laments the fact that *hē tōn splanchnōn sou taphē lēistōn gegone trophē* 'your innards have become victuals in the vitals of the pirates'.⁵⁰ That this turns out to be a bizarre *trompe l'oeil* contrived by the hero's friends does not detract from the initial *grand guignol* of the scene. Bizarre deaths without actual flesh-eating results are part of the fabric of Tragedy; one thinks of the report of Pentheus' dismemberment by Agave and her crew, all the more horrific when the mere report of his dismemberment is followed by the exhibit of the severed head, no longer misinterpreted by his mother as the face of a lion.⁵¹

Next to cannibalism for sheer horror value stand descriptions of bizarre tortures devised as punishments. We have two versions of a 'robbers' revenge' episode, one in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, one in an anonymous Greek version of the same story. Here is the robber's explanation of the punishment of a young girl caught escaping the band on the back of Lucius the ass:⁵²

I know that you'll applaud my clever device. We must kill the ass, which is lazy and even now pretends to be lame, and yet has been the helper and servant in the girl's flight. So at dawn let's slaughter it and gut its insides and throw away all its innards and this nice young miss let's house inside the ass, with her head sticking out so that she won't suffocate right away, with the rest of her body all hidden inside so that sewing them together we can throw them both outside to the vultures, a novel kind of breakfast prepared for them. Just think, friends, of the terrible torture, first living in the dead ass then to be broiled by the fiercest heat of the sun and dying of hunger but not able to suffocate. As for what she'll suffer as the ass rots with the stench and the maggots, I forbear to mention. And in the end the vultures will penetrate through the ass and they will tear her like him, perhaps even still alive ...

Apuleius sexualises the account: the girl is to be sewn naked inside his belly, since he would rather have her than them, and he is to 'enclose the rest of her body in his bestial embrace'.⁵³

Some horrors are less well co-ordinated and explained. Phlegon of Tralles retells a bizarre ghost story of Polycritus the Aitolarch.⁵⁴ He briefly marries a Locrian wife, then dies; the child his wife bears has both male and female genitals, and the assembly deliberates on what this means, whereupon Polycritus reappears as a ghost, and forbids them to destroy the child. When they ignore his warnings, he himself tears the child limb from limb, and eats all the parts except the head,

which then prophesies flight and disaster to the locality. It is difficult to make much sense of the tale as it stands. The idea of a prophetic head of a dismembered body is familiar enough from the Orpheus legend, but the father's ghost dismembering his own child seems as meaningless as it is horrific, as Hansen acknowledges. The story does not occur elsewhere, nor does the name of the protagonist. Such grotesqueness can however appear at a higher artistic level than mere *mira-bilia*. No sooner are the horrors of Troy recounted when Aeneas encounters a moaning mound with bleeding myrtle-bushes; a moaning voice reveals that the spot marks the murder of Polydorus.⁵⁵

Magic and magicians

A further source of horror lies in the treatment of magic and magicians. Such material ought to provide unlimited material for fantasy, but yet it demonstrates the curious limitations such subject-matter so often undergoes in an artificial literature. There is once more no lack of magic in the *Odyssey*: Circe uses deadly herbs to change Odysseus' men into pigs, and Hermes gives him the antidote moly to protect him against the witch.⁵⁶ But any folktale survival—a contest between good and bad medicine—is in this case submerged into a romantic story told for its own sake.

In sophisticated classical literature, magic does not always retain any primitive horrific effect. The poem which set fashions was Theocritus' Second *Idyll*, wherein a sorceress prepares to regain the services of her faithless lover by magic. The interest here is in the sorceress' emotional problems, and her various magical activities form only a decorative catalogue (melting wax, boiling lizards, consulting the moon); the same applies to imitations in Roman elegy and eclogue. Ovid used sympathetic magic in the story of Meleager, but his interest is again in the psychology of the mother who is about to kill him by burning his life-token in the fire.⁵⁷ Lucan set out to describe a horrible necromancy in *Pharsalia* 6; no bat's blood is spared here, but the effect is once more like a mere handbook of magic itself rather than any fantasy created out of it.⁵⁸

The most extensive 'witches' sabbath' to survive antiquity is the necromantic episode in Lucan in which Sextus Pompeius consults the witch Erichtho in order to find out the outcome of the still impending battle of Pharsalia. What might have been a culmination of the techniques of fantasy serves rather as a warning of the problems that arise when dazzling rhetorical effect predominates; it takes no fewer than some 70 lines to describe the conventional powers of witchcraft, and a further 62 lines to describe the powers of Erichtho herself. Original contributions by Lucan tend to belong clearly enough to the world of silver-age rhetoric. When Sextus' agents find the witch, she is performing a rite:⁵⁹

(Erichtho) was trying out words unknown to wizards and the gods of wizardry and inventing an incantation for a new purpose; for she was afraid that Mars would stray elsewhere and that the soil of Thessaly would be deprived of such a great slaughter. The witch forbade Philippi, polluted by her spells

and sprinkled with her dire drugs, to change the place of the war. She was about to claim all those corpses for her own and was about to put to use the blood of the whole world. She hoped to turn away the ashes of the Western nations and the bones of nobles and to have power over such mighty spirits of the dead. This is her passion, this alone is her task: what she may steal from the outstretched corpse of Magnus, what limbs of Caesar may she pounce upon ...

Heliodorus' description of a necromancy is notably more restrained than Lucan's: the author has resisted the temptation to go for chills, or to suffocate with horrific detail. The handling rather serves the purpose of contrasting the religious propriety of the real hero, Calasiris, with the forbidden rites of a witch. Beyond the necromantic ritual in the *Odyssey*, the witch's actions invoke a sense of precision rather than dread.⁶⁰

On top of all this she took hold of a sword, and in a mad frenzy she offered prayers to the moon, addressing it with barbarous and outlandish names, then cut with the blade across her arm, wiped the blood onto a bay sprig, and dripped it into the fire. And on top of all this she performed other weird and wonderful actions, then kneeling over the corpse of her son she incanted something in his ear, awoke the corpse and forced him by means of her magic to stand upright.

The interest of this episode is in its escalation: the corpse merely nods, then collapses; the witch renews her efforts with more powerful spells and this time compels the body to speak, only to hear a rebuke from the talking corpse of her own son, and a revelation that the rites are being witnessed by Calasiris and Charicleia. The enraged witch is killed, impaled through the groin by a broken spear, so fulfilling the corpse's prophecy of her fate.

It is only with Apuleius that such material is in sure hands—of a rhetorician working in second-century Africa, in an atmosphere where native superstition is able to reassert itself. In particular, it is difficult to see the tale of Thelyphron as a purely rhetorical exercise; the writer has succeeded in bringing ghoulish motifs into their own. First, a devil's bargain: Thelyphron is paid to guard a corpse, and if witches mutilate it, he must pay with the corresponding parts of his own anatomy. Witches do come in and put him to sleep, but both he and the corpse are still apparently intact in the morning. En route to the funeral, a relative accuses the corpse's widow of murder. An Egyptian necromancer summons it, but how can it prove that it is really the corpse? By revealing that the witches took Thelyphron's nose and ears instead of his own. Thelyphron feels for them, and their substitutes drop off.⁶¹

Horace's Fifth Epode comes perhaps closest to offering genuinely horrific fantasy. The situation is only gradually revealed through the protestations of the child about to be sacrificed ('What does this tumult mean; or why are everyone's grim faces staring at me alone?').⁶² Only now are we told that the child is facing

the witch Canidia and her friends. There is the standard but somewhat restrained prescription for the witches (screech-owls feathers, toad's blood, etc.), but the chill comes rather with the fact that thanks to Veia's digging, the victim can be buried alive up to his neck so that his excised marrow and his dry liver might serve as a love potion.⁶³ The presence of a fourth hag, the ominous Folia, is given only as a matter of rumour. The lack of effect of all this magic is suggested in the same gradual oblique way: Canidia's target, Varus, it seems, is still impervious. The boy, realizing the futility of his pleas, changes to a cursing tone, and indeed the boundary line between epode and cursing-poem is crossed. Then (he tells the witches) 'afterwards wolves would scatter your unburied limbs, and the birds of the Esquiline; nor would the parents that alas will outlive me fail to see this sight'.⁶⁴

It is what is left unsaid that ensures the horrific effect of this poem; for all the sparseness of detail, it must dawn at last that there is no escape, and the boy, for all his pleas or curses, is going to die. This is indeed impotent horror rather than mere Gothic décor.

Horace adopts a more light-hearted vein elsewhere when dealing with the witches' goings-on in *Satire* 1.8. Here, a Priapus narrates an adventure in which he has witnessed two local witches, Canidia and Sagana, picking over the former burial site now occupied by the *horti Maecenatiani*, as they search for bones to assist in their distasteful rites. Horace makes the most of the ghoulish details:⁶⁵

A pallor made both of them hideous in appearance. They began to scrape the earth with their nails, and tear apart a black lamb with their teeth; the blood poured into a trench, so that they might elicit the departed spirit from it to give them responses. And there was a doll of wool, a second of wax; the woollen one larger to inflict punishment on the smaller. The wax doll stood as a suppliant, as if expecting to die a slave's death. The one witch calls forth Hecate, the other invokes savage Tisiphone. You could see snakes and hell-hounds on the prowl, and the moon blush so as not to witness the scene, and hiding behind great sepulchres ... Why should I mention the details? How the shades resounded in shrill mournful tones at Sagana's queries, and how the beard of a wolf with the tooth of a spotted snake they buried stealthily in the ground, and how the flame flared greater with the wax image ...

In the course of his spying, the wooden scare-crow god lets fly a resounding fart, which puts the witches to flight and allows the god to claim the dubious glory of his mock-heroic exploit.

Curses

One sub-genre stands out for its contribution to horrific fantasy. Curses are part of ancient belief-systems with a ritual function closely allied to magic.⁶⁶ Cursing an enemy could be regarded as efficacious, whether in the form of a 'binding' spell to immobilise the victim or meting out justice for a perceived wrong. Curse tablets

would be typically inscribed on metal and buried in the ground, the responsibility of chthonic powers with pretentious and often outlandish names. Curses might entail the wishing of dire tortures and mutilation on the victim; Erotic magic might produce gleefully sexualised punishment for a reluctant lover.

At the literary end of the spectrum,⁶⁷ there emerge such pieces as the Pseudo-Virgilian *Dirae*, over 100 lines against perpetrators of the confiscations of 41 BC that form the background to Virgil's *Eclogues*. The poet employs extremes of rhetoric, envisaging the unjustly confiscated estates as beset with flood and fire, with dry soil turned to useless marsh, and concluding with other *adynata* of the same kind (98f.):

The sweet shall turn bitter, the soft shall be hard, eyes shall see white as black, right as left ...

Ovid, for his part, turns on a personal enemy of his own at some six times the length, evoking Callimachus' attack on Ibis in an extant poem of the same title. The enemy's corpse is to be denied burial, be torn by vulture and dogs, inherit the traditional punishments of the sinners in Tartarus and the rest.⁶⁸ The most literary curses share with their sub-literary counterparts the tendency to indulge in catalogue as horror is heaped on horror; the phantasmagorias of a Lucan are not far away.

Perverted art

Horror can also be achieved by the combination of murder, sacrifice or torture with some kind of perverted artistic purpose. One thinks immediately of the Bull of Phalaris, whose inventor Perilaus tries to tell the tyrant that as well as the death of conspirators, he will be able to listen to sweet music as the tortured victims inside the bull gasp their dying breaths through the flutes attached to its nostrils.⁶⁹ Less well known but no less grotesque is a bizarre *controversia*-subject (10.5) reported by the Elder Seneca:⁷⁰

Parrhasius the Athenian painter bought an old man from the captives at Olynthus that had been auctioned by Philip; he brought him to Athens. He applied tortures to him and used him as a model to paint Prometheus. The man died during the torture. Parrhasius put the painting in the temple of Minerva. He is accused of bringing harm to the state.

Some of the declaimers manage clever epigrams on the scene (11).⁷¹ The best is probably Albucius Silo's *Propter homines Prometheus distortus<est>; propter Promethea homines ne torseris* ('Prometheus was put on the rack because of men; do not put men on the rack because of Prometheus'). But others envisage Parrhasius' expressions as he actually executes the painting. Porcius Latro imagines the old man exclaiming 'Parrhasius, I am dying!' to which the artist replies 'Hold it like that'.⁷²

Conclusions

The examples discussed show flexibility on the one hand but predictability on the other. It is easy enough to put any subject-matter in a dream and to manufacture parallel material to enable it to prefigure some event still to come. Particularly to be expected is the theme of failing to reach heaven in a celestial flight, for whatever reason. In general, the subject-matter of dreams and nightmares is perhaps dealt with less imaginatively than the subject allows. Cannibal themes, magic rituals and the like are perhaps similarly constricted; we have noticed especially the lack of horror in Pliny's version of a standard ghost story. Horace's fifth *Epode*, on the other hand, brings us perhaps closest to real horror.

Notes

- 1 For the question of how far ancient dreams reflected actual experience, Harris (2009).
- 2 *Iliad* 2.5–40.
- 3 *Persae* 176ff.
- 4 *Wasps* 15–45.
- 5 *Wasps* 1031–1042.
- 6 *Frogs* 1331–1339.
- 7 Dover notes parody of Euripides *Orestes* 1431ff.
- 8 Apuleius *de Platone* 1.1; Athenaeus 11.507CD.
- 9 *Mercator* 225–254; another animal dream in *Rudens* 593–612.
- 10 Xenophon of Ephesus, *Ephesiaca* 2.8.
- 11 In *The Dream* 15.
- 12 Ovid. *Met.* 11.592ff.
- 13 *VH* 2.32–35.
- 14 *Odyssey* 19.560–569.
- 15 *Odyssey* 19.562–569.
- 16 *Aeneid* 6.893–899.
- 17 Austin (1977) ad loc. is content to remain mystified; Fletcher (1941) accepts that the gates of horn are the eyes, those of ivory the teeth; Virgil is telling what he has not actually seen.
- 18 Lucian, *Gallus* 12.
- 19 *Or.* 47.46ff.
- 20 *Or.* 48.41f.
- 21 *Or.* 51.44f.
- 22 *Or.* 49.3.
- 23 *Or.* 50.48f.
- 24 *Or.* 50.57.
- 25 *Or.* 51.58; 51.62.
- 26 *Or.* 50.60f.
- 27 *Or.* 50.106.
- 28 *De Rerum Natura* 4.1011–1036.
- 29 *Kathēmerinon* 8.
- 30 Artemidorus 2.23.
- 31 Artemidorus 2.68.
- 32 Artemidorus 2.55.
- 33 Plautus *Rudens* 928–936a.
- 34 *Navigium* 44.
- 35 *Navigium* 45.

- 36 *Frogs* 285ff.
- 37 1.7 ext. 6.
- 38 1.7 ext.10.
- 39 *Ep.* 7.27.8–10, on which see Felton(1999), 62–76; Ogden (2007), 208–220.
- 40 *Philopseudeis* 31; Felton (1999), 81–88; Ogden (2007), 208–220.
- 41 *Odyssey* 9.370.
- 42 Petronius, *Satyrice* 141.3–5.
- 43 Juvenal *Saturae* 15.77–83.
- 44 *Odyssey* 9.355–374.
- 45 *Met.* 6.650–664.
- 46 *Saturae* 15.14–16; 93–106.
- 47 *Saturae* 15.77–83.
- 48 *Saturae* 15.87–92.
- 49 Ovid *Met.* 8.875–878.
- 50 Achilles Tatius 3.16.4.
- 51 Euripides *Bacchae* 1114–1147;1275–1284.
- 52 *Onos* 25f.
- 53 *Met.* 6.31. There is similar grotesquerie in the fragment of Lollianus' *Phoenicica* relating to child sacrifice, (fr. B1 Winkler-Stephens 337–343).
- 54 *Mirabilia* 2, with Hansen's commentary (1996), 85–101.
- 55 *Aeneid* 3.22–48. Compare the protest at being plucked to that of Lucian's vine-women in *VH* 1.8.
- 56 *Odyssey* 10.233–243; 280–306.
- 57 Ovid *Met.* 8.451–525.
- 58 Lucan 6.420–830. On necromancy, Ogden (2001); on witches in general, Ogden (2008).
- 59 Lucan 6.576–587.
- 60 Heliodorus *Aethiopica* 6.14f.
- 61 Apuleius, *Met.* 2.29f.
- 62 *Epode* 5.1–4. On boy-sacrifice Ogden (2001), 196–201.
- 63 *Epode* 5.35–38.
- 64 *Epode* 5.89–102.
- 65 *Saturae* 1.8.25ff.
- 66 On the whole subject, Faraone and Obbink (1991).
- 67 For cursing-poems (*Arae*) as a form in their own right, Watson (1991); on cursing-tablets, Gager (1992).
- 68 *Ibis* 163–194.
- 69 Lucian, *Phalaris* 1.11.
- 70 *Contr.* 10.5.
- 71 *Contr.* 10.5.11.
- 72 *Contr.* 10.5.26.

6 Some fantastic aspects of myth

Myth operates very comfortably in the realms of the impossible, and Graeco-Roman literature from Homer and Hesiod onwards had a ready-made repertoire to draw on. Within a restricted compass, we may sample the impossible journeys to and from the Underworld and take a glimpse of the world above. Then we shall note the opportunities for fantasy in such familiar myths as those of Europa, and we shall then examine some developments of myth in the process of often subversive post-classical treatments. The major phenomenon of myths of metamorphosis will call for a separate handling in Chapter 7.

Longinus quotes a fragment of Euripides' *Phaethon* as an example of exercising the imagination: the youngster is being given brief realistic instructions on driving the Sun's chariot by his father. It is worthwhile to note the handling of this very theme where we have larger contexts, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (2.116–149) and Lucian's *Dialogues of the Gods* 24.2. Ovid is particularly inventive, since Phoebus actually anoints Phaethon with a fire-proofing ointment and instructs him to confine his path to only three of the five heavenly zones and to take a wide curving slantwise trajectory, amid other precise instructions. Ovid conveys the sense that father and son are running out of time for the trip; the boy needs no second invitation to be on his way. Lucian tells the scene in flashback, as Helius explains to Zeus after the event:

I set him up in the chariot and told him how to stand, how far to allow the horses' ascent, then incline down again, and how to control the reins and not give in to the unruly urge of the horses.

Ovid counsels to avoid a straight path; Lucian has the opposite instruction, not to mention the command from Zeus to repair the wrecked chariot. And in spite of the tragic nature of the story, Lucian still manages a comic scene—a dressing-down from Zeus for Helius' foolish conduct in giving in to his son's pleadings in the first place. The success of both authors depends on striking a balance between realism and fantasy in the handling of mythical material.

Down and up again: the impossible Underworld

The Underworld is an obvious starting-place for fantasy; unlike the lore of exotic lands, no distorting reports can underlie whatever fictions are placed here.

But such fictions soon run the risk of conforming to a more or less predictable series of situations. A number of basic motifs will underlie the *katabasis*, the journey down itself. One has to have a good reason for going there, usually to consult someone not available in the world above. In fact, most reasons are really somewhat circular; heroes such as Odysseus or Aeneas who 'have to' go to the Underworld could easily have been given their information from other informants such as Circe or Venus. The real object of the visit is usually to afford the audience or reader a view of the world below. One has to get there, with a guide and a passport; there will be old friends to meet and talk to across the void, sometimes a newly deceased companion, of whose death the visitor only becomes aware in the Underworld itself. There can be an encounter with a deceased parent, or with old comrades, not necessarily always inclined to communicate; there can be meetings with the great and the good, judgements and punishments and some kind of prophetic revelation to take back to the upper world. All this provides a flexible enough framework for inserting moral or philosophical material, or finding room for catalogues of the dead for the author's own individual purpose. Already Book XI of the *Odyssey* has acquired an apparently irrelevant catalogue of antique heroines that seems to have little to do with Odysseus' own journey to consult Tiresias,¹ and Virgil includes in his own underworld a historical pageant of Roman history,² to say nothing of Pythagorean and Platonic details on the transmigration of souls. And the hero can also take the opportunity to 'see the sights': the dog, the ferryman, the place of judgement and special punishments.

The traditional 'furniture' of Hades allows considerable scope for variation. Homer's equivalent of Hades is merely approached from the Ocean at the twilight land of the Cimmerians, and the dead come up to drink the blood of Odysseus' sacrifice; there is no actual descent as such. By the age of Virgil, all the traditional horrors can be inserted before Aeneas can even reach the river; there will be traditional monsters and a whole assemblage of ornamental allegories.³ The possibilities immediately present a danger that is recurrent throughout the repertoire of fantasy: that features run the risk of becoming standardised and of being readily reduced to a catalogue. This is especially so with the cavalcade of the dead themselves as early as Homer:⁴

Brides, young men, old men done with long suffering, tender maidens still nursing this first anguish of their hearts, and a great throng of warriors slain in battle, their spear-wounds gaping yet, and all their armour stained with blood. From this multitude of souls, as they fluttered to and fro by the trench, there came a moaning that was horrible to hear. Panic drained the blood from my cheeks.

Virgil's list at *Aeneid* 6.306–308 is similarly imagined:

Mothers and men and the bodies of great-hearted heroes finished with life, boys and girls not yet married, and young men placed on the pyre before the faces of their parents.

But here the presentation is intensified by two similes: that of leaves, transplanted from *Iliad* 6.146ff.; and of birds from *Iliad* 3.4f. But the personnel of the world below are not confined to the Epic tradition.

It is scarcely surprising that the Underworld in particular should be able to generate a host of comic, satirical or subversive developments side by side with the classic scenarios from Epic. In *Satire* 2.5, Horace is able to twist the subject-matter of the interview with Tiresias so that Odysseus is now concerned not for the homeward journey itself, but for how to recoup his material losses at the hands of the suitors.⁵ Tiresias gives him advice on how to cultivate the current and characteristic Roman social vice of *captatio*; perhaps there is also a slur on soothsayers, whom Horace regards with amused suspicion.

Old Comedy had already been able to open the floodgates of fantasy against an Underworld landscape. In *Frogs*, Dionysus' *katabasis* is burlesque enough, when his inept impersonations of Heracles' costume land him in trouble,⁶ but instead of the familiar judgements of the dead, we have literary criticism; instead of a weighing of souls, a literal weighing of verses.⁷ Lucian, looking back to the *Frogs*, once again produces humour from the disguise of Menippus en route to the Underworld in a combination of Orpheus' and Heracles' outfits.⁸

Virgil and Ovid on Orpheus and Eurydice

In addition, there is a small stock of characters who are set to come back up from the Underworld, most notably Eurydice. The Virgilian treatment of Orpheus and Eurydice has long puzzled because of its position in *Georgics* Book 4 as a whole. It occupies the inner epyllion or 'digression position' inside a larger epyllion of Aristaeus, to explain why the latter should have lost his bees and how he is to replenish his stock.⁹ The story is compressed; we have strong geographical evocation of the mourning mountains and later of the regions where Orpheus wandered. There is already a notable presentation of the bird-like huddle of the souls of the dead, later so strikingly transfigured in the *Aeneid* itself;¹⁰ we have Eurydice's own remonstrance against Orpheus forgetting his bargain and the pair struggling as Eurydice is forced back. There is the inexorability of Pluto ('if the shades know how to pardon'), and the image of the severed head of Orpheus, chanting Eurydice's name as it floats down the Hebrus. Apart from the last detail, this treatment of the familiar outlines makes its impact by its emotional and descriptive economy, and by its contrast with the story of Aristaeus himself, full of mannered 'Hellenistic' detail, particularly in the inventory of the nymphs who surround Aristaeus' mother Cyrene and the fairy-tale nature of the encounter with Proteus, who tells the Orpheus story itself.

Ovid's Epyllion follows his manner of carefully avoiding direct competition with Virgilian treatment, and does so partly in scale. Virgil's treatment is compressed, as a tale told by Proteus within the epyllion of Aristaeus; architecturally, Ovid opts—as he can easily afford to do in the expansive scheme of the *Metamorphoses*—for a larger scale, and in effect has the tale of the death of

Eurydice and that of the death of Orpheus serving as the frame to other stories of love:¹¹ those of Hyacinthus, Adonis and the rest. In fact, the death of Eurydice is itself told in a way that is straightforward and tragic enough; there is a case for arguing that it is a good deal less mannered and less Hellenistic than Virgil's. We have the signs of an ominous wedding, with the very torch sputtering; Hymen attends, but unavailingly.¹² Nothing is said here about the part traditionally played by Aristaeus; Eurydice simply treads on a snake, with no mention of an amorous pursuer. Although Orpheus sings his plea in the Underworld to the lyre, it is quite clearly a rhetorical *suasoria* in verse, though none the less effective for that; Hades will be able to claim her in due course. Even the Furies are weeping, to say nothing of the celebrated villains whose tortures are granted their traditional respite. And there may well be pointed contradiction of Virgil in the fact that Orpheus does not give Eurydice the pathetic speech of remonstrance she has in the *Georgics*; Ovid scores rather by asking how she could quarrel with the love behind his fatal concern.¹³ There is little room for pointed Ovidian wit, though he is not above making Orpheus comment on the bringing of Proserpina herself down to the nether world—an effective analogy, as she too had been negotiated out of the world below and should not have been taken either.¹⁴ And there is more than one mention of the 'double death' of Eurydice. But Ovid has reserved his power to subvert to the end: no sooner have we found him losing Eurydice than Orpheus is introducing homosexual love to Thrace.¹⁵ As so often, it takes Ovid little more than a few lines to undermine an established Virgilian masterpiece.

Heaven or Olympus

Heaven or Olympus is a good deal less stereotyped than the world of the dead, perhaps because mankind has normally a good deal less business there. There are rather fewer attempts, for example, at celestial topography, though again, as early as Homer, the world of the Olympians is imagined and presented often enough. The gods of the *Iliad* have 'dwellings', *dōmata*, on Olympus, and a social routine of banqueting and daily occupations. The specific degree of transfer of earthly facilities is underlined by the description of Hera's bathing arrangements in *Iliad* 14;¹⁶ she washes in quarters built by Hephaestus and clothes herself in a robe made by Athena, while adornments are narrated right down to her decorative earrings. Apollonius of Rhodes is able to go further along the same line of development when he presents Aphrodite interrupted in the process of attending to her hair, surprised by Hera and Athene, and all too willing to confess the delinquency of her son Eros.

Apart from the human comforts, a standard feature of divine activity to be expected is the celestial council. Such events can be concerned with some general ill or issue usually connected with mankind, or they can, in satirical literature, take the form of discussions of some present-day individual, be it a sceptical philosopher undermining the gods or a newly arrived Roman emperor expecting deification.¹⁷

Standard mythical narrative: the case of Europa

Aside from the background décor, the narrative possibilities of any myth can be shown to advantage by noting the varied presentations possible for an example common enough to be both relatively fixed and well-known. The classic version of the Europa story is the large-scale Hellenistic Epyllion by Moschus, stretching to 166 lines. The basic tale is told in linear form: the flower-gathering, the bull, the abduction, the procession, the kidnapped girl's reaction, the implications of landing in Crete. Characteristically for the Epyllion, there is the possibility of anticipatory ornament, and this is actually done twice. First, Europa herself has an allegorical dream of two women, Europe and Asia, disputing ownership of her. The actual form of abduction is anticipated too, in a scene inscribed on the basket used to gather the flowers, where the subject is Io's transformation and wanderings—not strictly parallel, as the wandering heifer is here the seduced victim, not the about-to-be seducer. In neither case will the anticipation have actually alerted the educated reader; the story would already have been too well-known. The bull, flowers and Europa's enthusiastic reaction can then be described. The centrepiece of this, as of most versions, will be the transmarine procession itself (115ff.), for which Poseidon provides the appropriate marine creatures. But this is only the preliminary for a description of the posture of Europa riding side-saddle. The billowing of her robe is a natural deduction from the crossing (like a ship's full sail), making her a light cargo. Only when land is out of sight does the evidently naive girl begin to ask questions: her carrier must be a god ('for bulls no more step out into the sea than do dolphins on land; perhaps he will be airborne next ...'). Only now does she reflect on her foolishness; she prays for the mercy and protection of Poseidon (whom she can identify of course in his own person). Zeus is now quick to reveal his intention ('marriage' [!] and royal offspring). A tiny rococo detail rounds off the narrative: 'The hours undid her cincture, and so did the girl become the bride of Zeus and the mother to his children'.

This version establishes itself as the standard and norm from which others will have to depart. Two Augustan workings develop the possibilities in quite different directions, both apparently taking care to avoid the focus offered by Moschus himself. For Horace, the framework is a Sapphic *propempticon* in which the journey of his lady-love Galatea is first established in the first six stanzas, leaving the Europa narrative to the remaining thirteen. This time no dream and no illustrated basket, but two stanzas only to see to the action from flower-garlands to arrival in Crete, with no procession. Europa's questions come only with arrival in Crete, and there is a pronounced guilt-trip, in which she blames herself and specifies suitably titillating punishment (*Odes* 3.27.49–52):

Shamelessly I abandoned the Deities of my father's house; shamelessly I delay the Underworld. If any of the gods hears this, may I wander naked among lions.

After a similar offer to tigers, we have her father joining in the condemnation; worst of all, apparently, is to card wool for a barbarian princess as her mistress. This time it is Venus, not Zeus, who offers reassurance, or rather orders:

You do not know you are the wife of Unconquerable Jupiter; have done with sobbing, and learn to accept your good fortune; half the world will bear your name.

Ovid, by contrast, has a predictably playful and irreverent angle in the version at the end of *Metamorphoses* II. This time, the emphasis is on the incongruity of Jupiter's choice between love and majesty. The description of the bull is not itself undignified; indeed, it is studiously refined: 'the muscles swelled out on his neck, and a dewlap hung down his flanks. Granted his horns were small, but so well fashioned that you would argue they were crafted by hand'. The loss of dignity is in his frolicking and playing on the green turf; he has already been characterised as father and ruler of the gods, whose hand wields the flaming three-forked bolt, whose nod shakes the universe—only to become an amorous bull! Again the action is greatly compressed. The girl was sorely frightened, and looked back at the sands behind her, from which she had been carried away. With her right hand she grasped the bull's horn; the other rested on his back, as her garments fluttered on the breeze.

Two later Greek prose workings are different again. From a storyteller's viewpoint, the most engaging of all might be argued as Lucian's. West and South-West winds discuss the pageant; the details of the procession are reworked only slightly ('and Zeus took on the form of a bull, and began to play with them, looking very lovely, for he was completely white, with well-rounded horns and a gentle expression ...'). The pageant itself follows Moschus fairly closely, but with the additional piquant detail that the nymphs are *hēmigumnoi* ('topless'). And a correspondingly 'modest' angle appears for Europa herself: 'she was blushing, and staring at the ground, for now she realised why she was being abducted'. The description then switches back to normal details of the Winds' conversation (where each was blowing, what they saw en route...).

Achilles Tatius uses a similar description as the initial *ecphrasis* of his novel about the partly seaborne adventures of the pair of lovers Clitophon and Leucippe. This time, the piquancy lies in the voyeuristic details of the account, setting the scene for a decidedly prurient handling of the novel itself. This time, as the description of a painting, it has to present the frightened women looking out to sea, but afraid to follow. But the centrepiece is the transparent dress (1.1.10f). Like Lucian, Achilles adds the physical presence of a love-deity—there two Tritons carrying Aphrodite, here an Eros leading the bull—and, provoking suitable conversation, the love-story itself.

Some Second Sophistic treatments

The resurgence of Greek self-consciousness under the early Roman Empire found expression in an often playful re-working of literary myth.¹⁸ It is hard to think

of any imperial Greek sophist we know about who would not have been able to find a major place in a major work for myth of some description;¹⁹ even Aelius Aristides devotes a whole declamation to the Embassy to Achilles in *Iliad* 9.²⁰ The interest in mythology is easy enough to account for: myth had a guaranteed place in traditional poetry and in both literature and art in general, and we should expect it to figure prominently at the hands of men who set great store by their Hellenic heritage.²¹ Moreover, the *mythos* was actually accorded a preliminary exercise (*progymnasma*) in the educational system of Greek rhetoric, and writers of handbooks had no shortage of suggestions as to how to handle it, especially in situations of *anaskeuē/kataskeuē* in which awkward questions might well be asked about a myth's credibility: would Medea really have left everything for Jason? Is it credible for Helen to have abandoned Menelaus?²²

We should note, too, the wide currency of myth at a popular level. Lucian rattles off an impressive range of myths purportedly performed as pantomime subjects in his *de Saltatione*;²³ Pausanias, though not by any means sophistic in outlook or spirit, testifies to the rich mythological seam readily available in what we might be tempted to regard as a guidebook tradition; and sophists were not slow to avail themselves of sources of oral tradition, or at least to claim that they had done so. Dio of Prusa purportedly draws his version of the *Allegory of Prodicus* from a wise woman in the Peloponnese; Philostratus gleans the details of his *Heroicus* from the scenario of a local vinedresser directly in touch with the spirits of the departed; *Cupid and Psyche* is told as an *anilis fabula* by a robber's moll.²⁴ Myth is everywhere to be seen and heard.

Many, but by no means all, sophistic handlings of mythological themes are concerned with what we might see as subversive revision. Most conspicuous among them is Dio of Prusa's *Trojan Oration* (*Or.* 11), in which, as a matter of routine, Paris wins Helen in legitimate marriage from her father on the strength of impeccable credentials superior to those of Menelaus;²⁵ once that is established, it is no great matter to accept the following:

It became evident to Hector, skilled as he was in the arts of war, that for all these reasons Achilles would be easy to overcome; so he confidently ranged himself against Achilles in the middle of the plain and at the start he gave ground as if fleeing, testing out his opponent, and at the same time intending to wear him out, sometimes standing his ground and sometimes running away; and when he saw him slowing down and giving way he himself turned round, and came at Achilles; when the latter was no longer able to carry his own weapons, he fought him and killed him, and took possession of his weapons, just as Homer has related.²⁶

All this and the ignominious peace treaty by which the Greeks withdrew from Troy without sacking it at all, and on the evidence of Egyptian records on their neglected or destroyed inscriptions!²⁷ Though Hittite records of the second millennium period do exist and can be used to monitor movements of the Akkhijawā,²⁸ it is difficult to acquit Dio of a very big joke in which his tongue

is held in his cheek for a very long time. The joke is not consistently or exclusively at the expense of Homer's text but also at the rationalising traditions of historiography, in which both Herodotus and Thucydides have a share.²⁹ All this is revisionism with a vengeance, and the revisionists are at play. If Achilles' victory over Hector is taken as standard, then its reversal here can be seen as sophistic fantasy.

Allied to such games with mythology are a handful of much smaller pieces, again in prose like the *Troicus* and *Heroicus*, which aim to recreate choice moments of myth. Once more, Dio is able to lead the way, most notably perhaps with such a piece as his *Chiron* (*Or.* 58), in which the old centaur is quick to put the young Achilles in his place after a fit of childish tantrums. The pupil has no time for learning about medicine or archery, the two subjects that might have saved him from his Achilles' heel, and Chiron is not slow to perceive in the dysfunctional delinquent the behavioural problems which will predispose him to mutilate the corpse of Hector.³⁰ But this view of the scene is not the only one possible; the Philostratus of the first *Eikones* presents his master and pupil combination in the form of a painting, and he sees the relationship very differently:

(*Imag.* 2.2): already the child wears a frown and a spirited manner, but he softens it with his simple expression, and by his gracious cheek sending out its tender smile.

A sophist is entitled at will to see the young Achilles as a bored bad boy destined for mutilation and massacre, or as forerunner to Achilles, the cultivated and civilised hero.

The art of miniaturising³¹ a myth depends very much on the technique of supplying just enough information to establish the traditional context, then 'running' what is really likely to have been said for just long enough to find an effective cut-off point. When Lucian allows Menelaus in *Dialogi Marini* 4 to discuss the nature of Proteus' metamorphoses, the latter compares himself to a cuttlefish who can change colour; that is a far cry from explaining changes of fire into water or water into fire. Even if Menelaus does not want to put the matter to the test by touching Proteus when he is on fire, he still admits himself puzzled: there has to be some kind of catch, but he cannot detect it. Now Lucian produces this effect in around the space of a Teubner page; he is able to leave the matter at just the point where Proteus, a curious exhibit in Homer to supply information to Menelaus about Odysseus, is here subtly transformed into an ordinary second-century charlatan after the manner of Alexander of Abonoteichos. One might invoke the influence of a number of rhetorical exercises on this process of transformation from Epic narrative to sophistic dialogue, after such a formula as 'What would Proteus have said if ...?' But in the end, we might also appeal to an elusive 'sophistic imagination' which we may still find difficult to characterise. Nor is its quality confined to Lucian. When Philostratus is interpreting a picture of Heracles and the Pygmies, he is able to evoke a similar effect of humour and pathos to that of Virgil describing the battle of the bees and how

haec certamina tanta can be put to rest *iactu pulveris*. Heracles has only to laugh at the Lilliputian threat, empty the besieging Pygmies into his bag and end the *ecphrasis* right there.³²

We have already noticed in passing a case where a sophistic writer reacts not to a literary version of a myth in the first instance, but to a representation in art. This practice is systematised, one might say, by a number of instances in two different Philostrati, who between them produce just over 80 *ecphraseis* of paintings, of which the great majority are mythological in subject.³³ In fact, we find that the elder of the two Philostrati tends to keep very close to often named literary models, with which he is clearly more at home than with any visual medium. The scenario of taking a 10-year-old child round a picture gallery helps him considerably to reinforce the literary aspect: ‘You have read about this in Xenophon, my boy, but have you seen the picture?’ is the typical formula he tends to fall back on. Here too we have the notion of a mythological repertoire as such. Again we might be struck by the range of possibilities. Take Philostratus on the birth of Athena, for example, *Imag.* 2.27.1:

The surrounding nymphs shudder at Athena newly burst from the head of Zeus in arms, thanks to Hephaestus’ contrivance, as the axe tells us.

Then we have a comment on the rainbow hue of the armour, before we return to the amorous implications for Hephaestus:

(2.27.2): And Hephaestus seems not to know how on earth to attract the lady goddess, for his means of luring her is already played out as she has been born complete with armour.

Lucian was a more direct approach: (‘What’s this? A girl under arms?’ *D. Deorum* 13). And there is a still more human presentation of Hephaestus’ overtures to Athena. He is welcome to try his luck, but Zeus knows that he is wasting his time.

Aside from the variety of treatment of the mythological repertoire, the actual selection of mythology can offer insights in itself. A glance at the subject-index of Aelian’s *Variae Historiae* produces several references to Achilles, but the examples are also revealing (*VH* 7.5); we find the hero carving the meat in person for the reception of the Embassy in *Iliad* 9.206–221 (*VH* 7.8), or Alexander is seen as more destructive in his grief for Hephaestion than Achilles in his mourning for Patroclus (both lay offerings on the Homeric tombs, Alexander on that of Achilles, Hephaestion on that of Patroclus). Or again we find a *chreia* (9.38) in which Alexander would have preferred to have seen the lyre of Achilles rather than that of Paris (with almost inevitable moralising). As we might expect from this author, it is the trivial that is uppermost, and even when opportunities for comparison between Achilles and Alexander the Great are seized upon, it is the trivial or even tabloid side of Achilles that is selected.³⁴ But it tells us something about the literary physiognomy and stylistic reflexes of one sophist, and we could extend the perspective to others.

When we look at the personality and tastes of individual authors, we might do well to look at the novel, which can be seen as a characteristic associate of sophistic literature, and here again, we seem to come across something at least worth noticing: that the sophistic novelists make extensive use of myth, while the rest—Xenophon of Ephesus, Chariton, *Apollonius of Tyre* and the like—by and large do not. And once more, we tend to find that sophists do not always follow the beaten track, but have a way of at least colouring their mythological excursions. Longus introduces into his narrative three subsidiary mythical narrations, and we might be tempted to think of Philetas' narration of his attempts to capture Eros in the garden as a fourth (2.4f.).³⁵ Of these, the example which has perhaps occasioned most puzzlement is the story told by Daphnis himself about Pan and Echo. Echo is torn to pieces when Pan drives the shepherds and goatherds mad, and the singing limbs are scattered over the whole earth, but the music lives on. This is very far removed from the standard versions of punishment of the chattering Echo as a disembodied voice, but it seems to sit oddly in the context of Longus' gentle pastoral action as well. It should illustrate that Daphnis, now sexually initiated, is dying to have Chloe, but he is very frightened of this, because of Lycaenion's warning that she will bleed. No less striking is the myth of Pan and Syrinx (2.34):

These Pan-pipes were not originally an instrument, but a beautiful girl with a musical voice. She would pasture the goats and play with the Nymphs, and she would sing as she still does. When she was grazing and playing and singing Pan approached her and tried to persuade her to do what he wanted, and promised he would make all her goats bear twins. But she laughed at his love, and said she could not accept as a lover someone who was neither wholly goat nor man; Pan made a rush to pursue her with force in mind. Syrinx took flight and getting tired she hid, and disappeared into a marsh. Pan was angry and when he could not find her he cut the reeds. He realized the suffering he had caused and invented the pipe, by binding together the unequal reeds with wax, just as his love itself was unequal. And beautiful girl as she was then, she is now the musical instrument.

This is an unconventional rendering of the tale. As befits a pastoral novel, it is told in a context of genuine rustic performance, at a thanksgiving for deliverance from a pirate raid; there is the usual rustic music and dancing. The teller, Lamon, can claim to be an 'elder of the tribe' passing on popular wisdom through oral tradition. Some touches reflect the pastoral viewpoint: Pan's bribe is the fertility of flocks (as a god, he would presumably ensure Syrinx's own fertility as well); rustics have a simplistic way of turning down unwanted amours (Daphnis rebuffs Gnathon in a similar fashion). The symbolism of the unequal pipes, unequal love, is not found elsewhere to my knowledge, and may well be no more than rhetorical embellishment—or a rustic simoleon's idea of it? The actual metamorphosis into the reeds is only to be inferred from her suffering (at having been cut down), and from the statement that the reeds were once a girl...

The same tale is told, at similar length, to explain a local chastity test by Achilles Tatius (8.6). For the same set of bare facts, almost close enough to suggest a common source, the effect is rather different:

Now the syrinx was neither a flute originally nor a reed, but a girl so beautiful as to be judged worthy of a place among the gods. Pan pursued her in an amorous race, but a thick wood received her as she fled. But Pan at her heels was stretching out his hand to lay hold of her. And he thought he was victorious in the hunt and had hold of her hair, but his hand held only a bunch of reeds; for they say she sank into the ground, and that the ground grew reeds in her place. Pan angrily cut the reeds, as they had snatched away his beloved. And as afterward she was nowhere to be found, he realized that the girl had been dissolved into the reeds, and he wept for the cutting, thinking he had cut up his beloved. So collecting the cut reeds as if they were the limbs of her body, and binding them into one, he kissed the reed-cuttings as if they were her wound; and he sang a mourning song by putting his lips to the reeds, and from above he breathed on the reeds as he kissed them. And his breath flowing through the opening in the reeds made flutelike sounds, and the syrinx gained a voice.

Here the rustic naivety has gone, and we are listening to a quasi-scientific explanation, akin to Achilles' several *naturwissenschaftlich* digressions. But that is not the overall emphasis: Achilles throughout has an interest in female dismemberment, and this is the mythical embodiment of it. He makes a point of being tactile about the severed limbs. Indeed, Achilles Tatius seems particularly inclined to go his own way and attain a kind of perverse and ambiguous individuality in every department; let loose on Perseus and Andromeda, he typically chooses to describe the monster's jaws, the horror of the Gorgon's head and the detailed description of the double-bladed sword (3.7). Again, in the myth of Rhodopis in the chastity tests, Aphrodite conspires to bring together the chaste Rhodopis and Euthynicus; Rhodopis is turned into a spring by the vengeful Artemis (8.12).

While on the whole, sophistic writers are inclined to keep to fairly well-trodden paths through traditional myth, there are exceptions, especially where the writer wishes to evoke some exotic background in a non-Hellenic culture. Sophists are in general inclined to find Hellas in paradoxical or unusual places, hence the story by Lucian of coming across an Ogmios among the Celts who seems to combine characteristics of Hermes and Heracles, and might be best explained as a misunderstanding of the portrayal of a Celtic deity;³⁶ or we might note the rather oriental version of the story of Deucalion in Lucian's *De Dea Syria* 12, where we find a *larnax* (ark) just as readily as we do in *Gilgamesh* or Genesis, and quite differently from the rather discreet version of Ovid in which the pair Deucalion and Pyrrha occupy an ordinary boat (*Met.* 1.319). We are reminded of the Eastern background of Lucian himself, proud to claim that Rhetoric has given a Greek identity to a Syrian (*Bis Accusatus* 30).

To these we might be tempted to add Lucian's version of the story of Charon, obtaining shore leave in order to investigate the upper world and the former lives

of the souls he transports. I can find no precedent for the idea of Charon obtaining leave; there is no actual ferryman in Homer (and no call for one).³⁷ Charon seems rather similar in function to the shadowy figure of the boatman Urshanabi in the Gilgamesh Epic, and it may be that as Near Eastern mythology is better understood, we can find such a case (Urshanabi comes back with Gilgamesh to be shown the walls of Uruk, while Hermes shows Charon the traces of Great cities of the past).³⁸ But for the present, this clever presentation of Charon as an impressionable tourist seems to be Lucian's own—the kind of naive moral inspector of the normal world we might recognise in Lucian's Scythian visitors to Greece, Anacharsis or Toxaris. There may well however be a folkloric component somewhere in all this: Charon shows apparent foresight of the deaths this or that individual is about to meet. Such accounts occur in modern Near Eastern tales, where a holy man may act strangely towards an individual because he knows that individual is destined to commit a violent crime or the like.³⁹

Aside from the general mythical landscape, fantasy is perhaps most readily enlisted in the invention of mythology itself. The most fruitful motif here is perhaps the 'charter' myth: because of some abnormal procedure at the point of creation, mankind is 'stuck' with some bizarre oddity of behaviour. Plato gives Protagoras a mythical version in which Epimetheus has botched the assigning of skills to the newly created animals; it is therefore necessary to endow man with *synesis politikē* (political understanding), and in equal quantities, thus accounting for present democracies or democratic instincts. We can illustrate with an entirely rhetorical invention of a 'made-up' myth along Platonic lines: (Fronto *de feriis alsiniensibus* 3.7–12; Haines 2.13–19):

Suppose two noble and well-born contenders Evening and Morning are disputing boundaries not yet marked out: both parties offer a demonstration of their own boundary. Sleep demands to intervene in the hearing, for he says that he too has an interest in the business, and claims he is being wronged ...

They say that Father Jupiter, when he was starting the human race in the beginning, split the duration of human life into two parts equal in all respects: one part in light, the other in darkness, and called them day and night, and devoted leisure to night and work to day. At that time Sleep had not yet been born, and everyone passed the time awake. But nightly rest instead of sleep had already been promulgated for men that were awake. And then gradually as men's minds are restless and want to agitate and disturb, Night and Day were both spent in business, and no time was allocated to leisure.

The situation can now be developed in a perhaps inventive and familiar fashion: Jupiter wants a god to remedy the situation and finds that Neptune and Dis are fully occupied already and cannot take on the task of supervising the rest needed by mankind, while other gods have interest in nightly activities (including Venus ...).

Jupiter then had it in mind to beget Sleep and adopted him into the gods, and he was put in charge of night and leisure, and Jupiter handed him the keys of the eyes.

Some invention of mythology can involve first-hand participation, and we can come up with a sophist encountering a sort of Heracles. There is the case extensively paraphrased by Philostratus in the *VS* (552ff.), in which Herodes Atticus meets some kind of wild man whom he sees as a Boeotian Heracles and from whom he receives moral observations and folk wisdom. The figure has been variously interpreted; Lucian knew of him and wrote what may have been a slightly different account in his lost *Sostratus*.⁴⁰ It may be that Herodes is simply hailing the discovery of a freak exhibit, by a kind of ‘cultural archaeology’; it is claimed that his figure speaks a purer Attic than is to be found elsewhere. Or, of course, Herodes may have been trying to write himself into myth—one thinks of the case of Midas and the satyr—or he may be the sort of sophist whose ego demands routine heroic encounters;⁴¹ the dreams of Aristides might provide us with more of the same.

The question of setting up and enacting myth certainly does take off in a famous case reported by Cassius Dio. We are told of a happening under Severus Alexander wherein a figure who seems to be a kind of Alexander the Great imitating Dionysus makes a royal progress through the Balkans to the Hellespont; he makes a sacrifice in the Troad, then disappears.⁴² Why? Dio is at pains to say how anxious the authorities were not to get in the way of this figure and his entourage of 400 fawn-skinned attendants. However we attempt to interpret this, we are reminded once more that sophists may not always have had to trawl the remote mythological past for mythopoetic materials.

Conclusions

To recapitulate, then: the myths of katabasis and anabasis testify to varied opportunities to develop the most familiar myths; so can such a familiar outline as that of Europa and the bull. Ovid and Lucian can vie with each other in inventing his father’s instructions to Phaethon. And Second Sophistic writers found a variety of uses for myth and employed a variety of ways to manipulate and distend the very substantial heritage of mythology to which they fell heir. They can find an infinitely resourceful set of ploys for manipulating myth, especially in directions which put its veracity under stress; or they can question the integrity of its literary authorities, whether Homer or others. Myths are amenable to treatment in artistic miniature, of which presentation as *ecphrasis* is a popular and characteristic example. Novelists may annexe them for additional colouring; sophists may even invent or actually enact myths on their own account.

Notes

- 1 *Odyssey* 11.225–332.
- 2 *Aeneid* 6.756–853.
- 3 *Aeneid* 6.274–289.
- 4 *Odyssey* 11.38–41.
- 5 Horace *Satires* 2.5.
- 6 Aristophanes *Frogs* 464–673.
- 7 *Frogs* 1364–1413.

- 8 Aristophanes *Frogs* 38–47; Lucian *Menippus* 1.
- 9 *Georgic* 4.453–527.
- 10 *Georgic* 4.475–478.
- 11 Ovid, *Met.* 10.1–11.66.
- 12 Ovid, *Met.* 10.1–7.
- 13 Ovid, *Met.* 10.60f.
- 14 Ovid, *Met.* 10.28f.
- 15 Ovid, *Met.* 10.83ff.
- 16 *Iliad* 14.166–188.
- 17 See c. 13.
- 18 For characterisations of the Second Sophistic, e.g. Anderson in Russell (1990), 91–100; Whitmarsh (2005), 3–22.
- 19 See in general Bompaire (1958), 191–203.
- 20 Aristides *Or.* 16.
- 21 On Hellenism in the Empire, Swain (1996); for later Antiquity, Bowersock (1990).
- 22 For a brief account, Anderson (1993), passim, especially 171–199.
- 23 *De Saltatione* 61, Anderson, (1977), 280–282; Lada-Richards (2007), 98–103.
- 24 Dio, *Or.* 1.52–84; Philostratus, *Heroicus* passim; Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 4.28.1.
- 25 *Or.* 11.48–61; see further c. 11.
- 26 *Or.* 11.96.
- 27 *Or.* 11.38.
- 28 Cf. D. Page (1956), 1–40.
- 29 For Philostratus' *Heroicus*, c.11.
- 30 *Or.* 58.5f.
- 31 On the technique see further Anderson (1993), 190–196.
- 32 Philostratus *Imagines* 2.22.4; cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 4. 86f.
- 33 Cf. Anderson (1986), 259–268.
- 34 For the treatment of Alexander in particular, Anderson (1993), 182f.
- 35 For general discussion of Longus and the myths, Hunter (1983), 52–57.
- 36 Lucian, *Heracles* 3–5; Bompaire (1958), 725ff., with previous bibliography.
- 37 For Lucian's handling of Charon, cf. Terpening (1985), 115–119.
- 38 Gilgamesh tablet X.iiff.-XI.vi (Dalley (1989), 102–105, 118–120; Lucian, *Charon* 23.
- 39 Cf. the folktale type Aarne-Thompson-Uther 759.
- 40 Lucian, *Vita Demonactis* 1.
- 41 For further interpretation, cf. Anderson (1989), 171–175.
- 42 Dio 79.18.1–3; cf. Millar (1964), 214–218.

7 The ultimate myth

Metamorphosis

Horace famously seems to be singling out the presentation of metamorphosis as unseemly more than once in the *Ars Poetica*. He does not want Cadmus to be transformed into a snake on the Tragic stage: ‘whatever you show me like this, I don’t believe and find revolting’.¹ Unnatural changes of shape seem an obvious enough subject for fantastic literature,² though Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* might seem difficult to imagine if it did not actually exist already. Here we find maidens changing into trees, pirates into dolphins, rulers into stars or the like, in many cases for what appears to be no apparent reason, or, to us at least, with insufficient explanation. Of course in Ovid’s case, we are dealing with a deliberately all-inclusive catalogue of metamorphoses, so that it would be surprising if changes were not prominent. But we might well ask why it should be that he can lay his hands on so many examples in the first place.

Towards a science of change?

There is certainly a wide range of types of metamorphoses imaginable: the gods may look like, or arguably even change into, birds or other creatures; marine deities may go through a fixed cycle of changes to elude capture; people may be changed in shape into animals, plants, natural features or even heavenly bodies, often because of some unnaturally inhuman behaviour, and the process may often be envisaged gradually in stages. Again, bodies may change sex, or souls may transmigrate from one body into another in a continuous sequence.

Quasi-scientific speculation can offer some notion of why so many birds have changed from being men (Plato, *Timaeus* 91D):

And the tribe of birds derive by transformation, as they grow feathers instead of hair, from harmless but light-minded men: they study the worlds above, but in their simple-mindedness suppose that the most substantial proofs about such things come about through visual observation.

In the first place, we can note that in the ancient world, biology was a relatively undeveloped science. It was and is a mere matter of observation that a caterpillar will undergo metamorphosis into a chrysalis, then into a butterfly. But since

Darwin at least, we are conditioned to think of 'forward' evolution of species. In the ancient world, this was by no means the case: there is no reason for a man not to regress (as we should see it) into what we should regard as a 'lower' species. All ancient man has to go on is the apparent physical resemblances between species; most men who undergo transformation will change into mammals of some sort. What we should regard as 'evolutionary' development backwards causes no problems, and in Ovid's stories, it is all frequently no sooner said than done in any case. What we have to do to transport ourselves into a world of metamorphoses is to see the world as the first hunters might have seen it. If someone puts on an animal skin, do they take on the animal's identity as well? Or if you make yourself a dress of bark or leaves, are you in some sense 'becoming' a tree? Whatever the answer, the way is open for further applications of fantasy.

Perhaps the most sophisticated construction of the animal kingdom in ancient thought lies in the attitude to the bees. Virgil gives us a humorous but reverent picture of their miniature culture in his fourth *Georgic* and connects their supernatural quality to their services to Zeus.³ Their regeneration is seen as activated from a rotting animal carcase. On the other hand, even Ovid can on occasion revert to a quasi-scientific picture of the evolution of animals from the mud after the flood.⁴

A rationale of metamorphosis?

Nothing, however, quite prepares us for the profusion of metamorphoses of species that seem to come into being in this same semi-mythical period, and often on a one-off basis. Daphne becomes a laurel, and after that all laurels are sacred to Apollo; Scylla cuts off her father's hair, and then becomes the cutter bird *ciris*, cutting the waves.⁵ What does it all mean? We have one particular metamorphosis that offers a kind of paradigm for Ovidian metamorphoses in general: the story of Tereus, Procne and Philomela in *Metamorphoses* 6. Tereus, the Thracian king, husband of Procne, raped her sister Philomela and cut out her tongue to prevent her telling the tale. She wove the scene on a tapestry and revealed the deed (perhaps suggesting a preliterate source?). The women took their revenge by serving up Tereus' son Itys as a dinner. All three change into birds: Philomela into the Nightingale, Procne into the swallow, and Tereus into the Hoopoe.⁶ Ovid's version is as usual unpredictable, but with a certain appetite for the grotesque. The Hellenistic writer Boio(s)' version of the story was considerably different. He has the married pair under different names, boasting that their marriage is better than that of Zeus, and so exciting divine envy; the husband's occupation is itself that of a weaver (Philotechnos). But we are still left asking: why?⁷

Can we rationalise such stories? It may be that in some cases at least, we can. There is the story of Actaeon, where Ovid's version has him actually changing into a stag. But an earlier Greek version of the scene show what might well be an earlier conception, where instead of actually being changed into a stag, Actaeon is only *wearing* a stag skin.⁸ That at any rate would offer a possible explanation of the story that actually makes sense. Suppose we have a man who decides to spy on a goddess bathing; how might he remain inconspicuous? By covering himself

in a stag-skin disguise, readily available to one who actually hunts stags. With or without the instigation of the goddess, his hounds, trained to attack stags, will of course savage anything in a stag skin.

Exploiting the grotesque

In fact, Ovid certainly addressed himself to at least some restraints: in only a minority of some 250 metamorphoses stories told or alluded to is the fantastic metamorphosis actually the centrepiece of the story. Many of the tales are more obviously concerned with love or seduction, and the metamorphoses (often more than one at a time) are relegated to a few lines of tailpiece. Even here, of course, fantasy is inevitably present, and Ovid can nuance it neatly in one way or another. But in other cases, the metamorphosis itself is allowed to become something more: Ovid has his own way of supplying the very metamorphosis (of Cadmus) that Horace abhors when it is shown on the stage. The familiar transmutation is neatly prepared in a prophecy at the beginning of book 3. Cadmus has slain the snake by an Epic struggle; he is warned that he himself will be so transformed. The nuance that he himself will wish for such a transformation is deferred to book 4; the metamorphosis itself is then described in an 'itemising' way—lengthening of the body, hardening skin, formation of scales and much else—but any element of banal realism is dispelled by a wry grin on Ovid's part:⁹

His arms still remained; he stretched out what remained of them, and with tears flowing from what was still a human face he said 'come close, come close, most pitiable wife, and while there is still something remaining of me, touch me and take my hand, while it is a hand, while not all of me is snake'. He wanted to say more, but suddenly his tongue was split in two, nor could he say the words he wanted, but as often as he tried to utter some complaint, he gave a hiss—this was the voice nature left him.

Ovid varies this same motif—more or less appropriately—in other transformations, as when Baucis and Philemon are similarly cut off in the middle of transformation into trees.¹⁰ In neither case does one necessarily suspect that the character being transformed has done anything to 'deserve' this whimsical treatment, whereas in the case of Apollo chasing Daphne, the would-be seducer is cut off from his quarry just as the bark closes over her quivering limbs, and we are left with a carefully prepared anti-climax: *at quoniam coniunx mea non potes esse, / arbor eris certe* ('Since you cannot be my love, at least you will be my tree ...').¹¹

It might be felt that the conception of a catalogue of metamorphoses posed impossible problems for author and audience alike. A book of metamorphoses might have been difficult enough from the point of view of literary variety, let alone a sequence of 15 such books. But Ovid has taken precautions; relatively few metamorphoses actually preoccupy the stories in which they occur, and they can be inserted as little more than afterthoughts to stories with a completely different emphasis.

In a good many cases, Ovid is able to exploit the precise details of a transformation: human features are able to translate into something associated with the new creature, as in the case of the wolf-man Lycaon.¹² But metamorphosis is not always relegated to the end of an episode. Particularly in a case where the mythical tradition allows change back into a human form, Ovid may choose to expatiate upon the changed life of the victim, as of Io, changed to a heifer in a vain attempt to avert the anger of Juno:¹³

Even when she wished to stretch out her arms as a suppliant to Argus, she had no arms to stretch, and when she tried to complain she could only moo: she was afraid of the sound, and was terrified by her own voice. She came to the bank of the river Inachus, where she often used to play; but when she saw her jaws gaping and her strange horns reflected in the water, she took fright and fled, terrified of herself.

There is as much grotesqueness here in the wordplay, as Ovid plays with the dual identity of Io: Apuleius exploits Lucius' plight in a similar fashion: ('he tried to do x but could only do y').

The cases of Circe and Photis

In one case at least we can 'follow through' the development of a celebrated episode of metamorphosis from an uncomplicated rendition in Homer to a more subtle and sophisticated approach more conscious of the absurdity. In the case of Circe and the transformation of Odysseus' crew, the initial version in the *Odyssey* is spaciously told, but it is as if the least interesting feature to Homer himself is the actual point of the metamorphosis:¹⁴

Circe led them in and sat them on couches and chairs, and for them she mixed cheese and barley and yellow honey with Pramnian wine; but she mixed dire drugs to make them forget their homeland; she gave it to them and they drank, and then touching them with her wand she drove them into the swine-pens. And they had the heads of swine and their voice and bristles and their whole appearance, but their minds were unchanged from what they were before. And so they went crying. And to them Circe gave mast, and acorns and cornel-berries to eat, such as swine eat that wallow on the ground.

The point is that no metamorphosis has actually been mentioned in so many words. It is almost as if there is no need, since now they grunt and have snouts and bristles. But their human aspect is still insisted upon. There is no hint, either, as to why Circe actually does any of this in the first place; one suspects Homer does not really know in any case. Ovid adopts a very different approach:¹⁵

We took the cups offered from her revered hand. The moment we drained them with our arid throats, such was our thirst, and the dire goddess touched

the tops of our heads with her wand (it shames me and yet I will admit it), I began to be rough with bristles, nor was I any longer able to speak, but instead of words gave forth a hoarse grunt, and my whole face fell to the ground, and I felt my mouth harden into a curved snout, and my neck swell with folds of skin; where just now my hands had taken up the goblet, they made tracks as feet in the earth.

Here the whole experience is transformed in any case by the use of first-person narrative. And Ovid does not shrink from detailed description of the process as well as the result (though Macareus, the narrating victim, does not relish the memory).

There is a major change of perspective too in the presentation of Circe's household. For Homer,¹⁶

They heard Circe inside singing in her lovely voice, going to and fro on the great immortal loom. Her divine work was fine and pleasing and shining.

There is nothing extraordinary here, though we have already been told briefly in passing that the mysteriously tame wild animals are Circe's victims. But we have a very different scene in book 4 of Apollonius' *Argonautica*¹⁷ from a Hellenistic perspective:

And beasts, not like flesh-eating creatures nor completely resembling men, but with a mixture of limbs from each, came forth together ... such the earth brought forth from mud, made of assorted limbs.

Here the overall effect is suitably 'scientific'; it is as if Circe has a Jekyll-and-Hyde laboratory where mutants can be nurtured. We are in an Alexandrian world indeed, where grotesqueness joins forces with scientific observation. Ovid cannot of course use such a presentation as it stands, since the heroes would have been unmistakably warned by the sight of these monstrous hybrids, but he has another solution:¹⁸

Circe sits in a beautiful recess on her stately throne, clad in a shining robe and enclosed in a golden veil above. And Nereids and nymphs together, who do not move their fingers to draw out fleeces nor lead out the following thread, but they lay out grasses and flowers scattered about; these they separate into baskets, these and the herbs of various colours; Circe directs the work they do, she knows what uses there are for each leaf, what accord there is in their blending, and notes the tasks and weighs out the herbs.

There is a strong tradition of this kind of sorcery in oriental tales. Inanna/Ishtar had a reputation for changing her lovers into beasts once they were discarded; the Sumero-Babylonian hero Gilgamesh takes her to task for exactly that, and recites a whole catalogue of the shapes into which she turned her lovers.¹⁹

One conspicuous story in the ancient repertoire seems to exist wholly in a magical context: the story of Lucius in *The Golden Ass*. Only Apuleius, as opposed to Ovid, does full justice to the limitations imposed by transformation; here too we have the rare example of a Greek and a Latin working of the same (lost) basic text. Here is the presentation of the very moment of metamorphosis as imagined by an anonymous Greek author (*Onos* 13):²⁰

I hurried and already stripped and rubbed myself all over, but by ill-luck I did not change into a bird, but a tail came out of my rear and my fingers disappeared I know not where, and four remaining nails became hooves; my feet became animal feet and my ears were huge and my face was large. And when I looked round in a circle, I saw that I was an ass, and I did not have a human voice to take Palaestra to task.

There does not seem to be a great deal of scope for variation; one transformation into an ass should expect to be much like any other (Apuleius, *Met.* 3.24):

I threw off all my clothes, greedily immersed my hand in the jar and pulled out a large amount, then rubbed all my limbs, and already trying each arm in turn I attempted to flap my wings the way a bird would. But no little feathers, no little pinions appeared from anywhere but clearly my body hairs were hardening into bristles and delicate skin hardened into hide; and at the ends of my fingers they lost their number and all my fingers were forced into single hooves, and from the base of my spine proceeded a large tail. Already my face was enormous and mouth was enlarged and my lips were hardening; likewise my ears were greatly enlarged and bristled. I saw no consolation for this unfortunate change of shape, but my member was growing, though I could no longer embrace Photis.

The Latin working is slightly more detailed over all, but it also raises the delicate matter of the ass's member, which will assume considerable importance later in the narrative. Oddly, it is Apuleius who chooses to be salacious here, whereas overall the Greek version is the more lubricious of the two.

Some explanations

One type of story extends this magical aspect still further, or seems to; we are aware of a number of stories involving someone who practises shape-shifting, the classic example being the Egyptian god Proteus.²¹ But there are others, including Ovid's (unnamed) Mestra or Hypermestra, who keeps changing her shape to sell herself to feed her voracious father.²² And of course the gods themselves can exercise a prerogative of continually changing shapes. It is perhaps unsurprising that the sky-god Zeus turns out also to be the shape-shifter par excellence; we only need to look at the vast possibilities of cloud formation to imagine why.

We should note that whereas Ovid in particular presents transformations as relatively gradual, Homer is able to present what appear to be instantaneous transformations, as when (controversially) Athena departs from Telemachus *in the form of a bird*. As Buxton has painstakingly shown,²³ translation here tends to be dependent on one's own view of Greek religious thought, where some scholars have difficulty with gods undergoing literal transformations into bird form rather than merely looking like birds. Part of the trouble is that in English, as in Greek, 'taking the form of a bird' and 'looking *like* a bird' are very close together anyway, unless one sets out to force a deliberate distinction between them.

So far we have dealt with the phenomenon of transformation into animals for the most part. But how do we account for such events as transformation into rocks, trees, rivers and other features of the landscape? Again, we can appeal in the first instance to physical resemblances, at least in the first two cases: one can as readily imagine human features in rock faces or tree trunks, and indeed imagination may not be necessary at all; exposed fossils of animals (or humans for that matter) may be 'caught' in a geological stratum.²⁴

Why, then, do metamorphoses take place? In some cases, at least, it appears that ancient authors themselves, or even their characters, did not expect to know. When Hermes changes to an animal-headed god, and Io changes back from a cow into a human, it may be better not to ask too many questions:²⁵

- West Wind:* But already she's crossed the sea and swum ashore. Do you see how she's no longer walking on four feet, but Hermes has straightened her into a beautiful woman again?
- South Wind:* This is all amazing, Zephyrus; she no longer has horns or a tail or cloven hooves, but she's an attractive girl. But why is Hermes changing himself and becoming dog-faced instead of a young man?
- West Wind:* Don't be too inquisitive, as he knows what he has to do better than we do.

We can nonetheless attempt an answer. In some cases, at least, metamorphosis seems to be a sort of divine punishment: boast of sleeping with a god, or being more beautiful than a goddess, and this is the sort of trouble you can expect, with whatever you felt to be your proudest feature determining what species you transfer into. In other cases, it seems to be a punishment for a crime so inhuman that its perpetrators can no longer be tolerated within the human race and human society. Lycaon commits infanticide and tries to test Jupiter with a cannibal feast: he becomes a wolf. When Tereus commits rape and mutilation and ultimately (unwitting) cannibalism, and Philomela and Procne commit infanticide, there may seem nothing for it but to give them a change of identity—rather as we might devise a total change of identity in a witness protection programme; here again is the opportunity of a fresh start.²⁶ But there are a large number of other motivations possible: Perdix is changed to a partridge to save him from falling to his death at the hands of his uncle Daedalus; Meleager's sisters are changed into birds by

Diana when Meleager's house is felt to have suffered enough—another 'fresh start'.²⁷ In a few instances there is actual deification (as of Romulus/Quirinus), or *katastērismos*, transformation into a constellation; after a scene not unlike the argument in the *Iliad* over the death of Sarpedon, Venus is insinuated seamlessly into recent Roman history:²⁸

He had scarcely spoken when Venus the nourisher invisible to all stood in the middle of the senate-house to tear out the soul of Caesar from his body and did not allow it to dissolve into the air. And she felt it catch the light and burn as she sent it forth from her bosom; it flew higher than the moon, and dragging its flame-bearing tress it shone forth as a star, and seeing the great deeds of his son, acknowledged that they were greater than this own, and rejoiced to be outdone by him.²⁹

Metamorphosis also extends to sex-change; there is little to choose between the account of Ovid and that of Phlegon of Tralles, both presenting the change from female to male as compensation to Caenis for her rape by Poseidon,³⁰ and others of Phlegon's reports of the phenomenon bear out that hermaphroditism of one kind or another was genuinely observed and reported in antiquity.³¹ On the other hand, Tiresias' unusual double transformation from male to female, then back to male, is motivated by the forbidden sight of two snakes mating, or some similar variation, but not sufficiently clearly in any of the versions to 'explain' the story.

In some instances, at least, we can suspect incompletely understood science. We have noted the misunderstanding that the decaying carcase of an ox gives rise to bees; so indeed it does, but not in the way understood by Virgil or Ovid.³² If the Lycian peasants are changed by Leto into frogs for refusing her a drink³³ (*Met.* 6.349–381), there may be mistaken conflation of events. A local flood wipes out the human population, and only the frogs remain—*therefore* the humans must have been changed into frogs! In the speech Ovid ascribes to Pythagoras in book 15, we have a host of examples wherein the natural world does furnish instances of metamorphoses, most notably the chrysalis which gives rise to the butterfly;³⁴ every authentic instance must necessarily reinforce the belief in metamorphosis as an idea that really is supported by factual evidence.

The time-frame for these transformations may be significant as well. They mostly belong to a mythical past when the world as we now know it is somehow still evolving; there is as yet no laurel tree until Daphne is turned into the very first one. On the other hand, the one-directional sex changes reported by Phlegon are historically dated in recent times, and so are once more treated as curious facts rather than fantastic inventions.

Other categories have also to be considered. We have a small number of figures who seem to specialise in serial transformation or shape-shifting; Proteus and Thetis, the marine divinities, have this facility, and holding them as they change shape is necessary in order to extract information from the one or to marry the other. This may be a reflection of their mutability as marine creatures, but transformation into fire in particular seems a difficult transition to accept; indeed

Lucian has Menelaus highly sceptical in his encounter with Proteus as to what is actually going on.³⁵ Proteus' own analogy with the adaptation of an octopus to its surroundings does not convince, nor should it. In fact, the original Homeric list in *Odyssey* 4 includes lion, leopard, tall tree and water, but not fire; it is attributed to Thetis at Apollodorus 3.13.5. The whole cavalcade is not too difficult to account for: the master of seals might not seem too absurd as a sea-lion; entanglement in the marine vegetation, and hiding in it, would present him as a tree; the sting of an aggressive sea-creature would offer a burning sensation, and so on ...

Transmigration, as conceived by the school of Pythagoras, offers further possibilities for imaginative development, though the original idea is not strictly equivalent to metamorphosis as such. A comic presentation is offered in Lucian's dialogue *Gallus* about a domestic cock who has been through a whole sequence of transformations, first the traditional ones of Apollo into Euphorbus into Pythagoras, and then (fictitiously) the courtesan Aspasia, the Cynic Crates, 'then a king, then a pauper, a little later a satrap, then a horse, a jackdaw, a frog and countless other creatures; it would take a while to list each one. And recently often a cock, for I was pleased with that kind of life'.³⁶ Here there is a reversion to the position adopted by Plato in the Myth of Er, in which the soul about to transmigrate is able to make an informed choice of the next life it will adopt. In that case, the soul of Orpheus opts for a swan, the soul of Thamyras for a nightingale; Thersites opts for an ape, while Odysseus goes for the life of the common man.³⁷

Conclusions

Whatever the ultimate origin of metamorphosis accounts, the writer of fantastic literature has a broad range of options available. Any accounts of human experience of metamorphosis at least can focus on the unexpectedness, the pathos or the absurdity of the operation, or indeed some mixture of all three. The overall impression of Ovid's treatment is that we live in a world where fantastic metamorphosis is more or less the norm. There are even a number of 'set pieces' where participants actually discuss metamorphosis as a topic of conversation, as when Theseus is a guest in the grotto of the river-god Achelous, or where women engaged in domestic tasks can tell one another stories of metamorphosis to while away the time.³⁸ Or in a very different ethos, metamorphosis may be seen as part of the world of magic and witchcraft, as in the 'sorcerer's apprentice' story that underlies *The Golden Ass*.

Notes

1 *Ars Poetica* 186f.

2 For metamorphosis as a mythological phenomenon, see now R. Buxton (2009). For its place in the sources, Forbes Irving, (1990), 7–37. A wide-ranging approach in Warner (2002).

3 Virgil, *Georgic* 4. 149–218, with the commentaries of Thomas and Mynors.

4 *Met.* 1.416–437.

5 *Met.* 1.550–567; *Met.* 8.85f., 150f.

- 6 *Met.* 6.424–674.
- 7 Antoninus Liberalis 11. For discussion, Forbes Irving 100f.
- 8 *Met.* 3.194–197; stag-skin version: Pausanias 9.2.3, citing Stesichorus.
- 9 *Met.* 4.581–589.
- 10 *Met.* 8.712–719.
- 11 *Met.* 1.557f.
- 12 *Met.* 1.232–239.
- 13 *Met.* 1.635–641.
- 14 *Odyssey* 10.233–243.
- 15 *Met.* 14.276–284.
- 16 *Odyssey* 10.221–223.
- 17 Apollonius 4.672–677.
- 18 *Met.* 14.261–270.
- 19 Gilgamesh Tablet Viii (Dalley pp.78f).
- 20 *Onos* 13. For the complex relationship between the versions, see van Thiel (1971/2).
- 21 *Odyssey* 4.456–459; cf. the case of Thetis, Apollodorus 3.13.5.
- 22 Ovid, *Met.* 8.872–874.
- 23 Buxton (2009), 29–37.
- 24 For the whole subject, A. Mayor (2000).
- 25 Lucian, *D. Mar.* 11.2.
- 26 Lycaon: *Met.* 1.211–237; Tereus, Procne, Philomela: *Met.* 6.424–674.
- 27 Perdix: *Met.* 8.239–255; Meleager: *Met.* 8.533–546.
- 28 Romulus, *Met.* 14.823–828; Julius Caesar, *Met.* 15.745–851.
- 29 *Met.* 15.843–851.
- 30 *Met.* 12.198–209; *Peri thaumasiōn* 5.
- 31 Phlegon, *ibid.* 6–9.
- 32 *Georgic* 4.548–558; *Met.* 15.361–367.
- 33 *Met.* 6.349–381.
- 34 *Met.* 15.259–458. See further Beagon in Hardie (2009), 288–309.
- 35 *D.Mar.* 4.3.
- 36 Lucian, *Gallus* 16–20.
- 37 Plato, *Republic* 10.620A–C.
- 38 *Met.* 8.547–884; *Met.* 4.32–388.

8 Bizarre banquets, topsy-turvy tables

Greek and Roman dinner parties¹ are the focus of creative literature for a variety of reasons. Symposia provide the standard social occasion in Antiquity, and as such offer a marker for morals and manners. They are an appropriate medium, too, for a literature of relaxation; they can also act as flexible containers for all manner of literary and indeed un-literary activity; poetry readings and courtesans² are equally at home within the form.³ Moreover, the relatively early establishment of Plato's *Symposium* as a literary classic set a standard for others to emulate. One notices accordingly a steady stream of 'unusual' dinners and eccentric events at dinner-parties throughout Antiquity, where imagination and trenchant social perception go hand in hand. There is just too much material to make for easy characterisation; at this stage, it is useful to proceed by illustration rather than exhaustive treatment. Much of the interest will lie in the fact that here realism and fantasy actually threaten to converge or even coincide.

Symposiac tradition

Plato's classic *Symposium* is certainly not the first of its kind. One thinks of Hephaestus already raising a laugh with his antics as a waiter at the dinner of the gods in the first book of the *Iliad* (597–600); we find fantasy dinners of one sort or another as a staple of Old Comedy, most conspicuously when the hero is celebrating the benefits of whatever his fantastic adventures have been able to gain;⁴ and Aristophanes himself wrote a lost *Daitaleis* ('Banqueters'). The possibilities are well suggested by the contrasting meals that await the peace-loving citizen Dicaeopolis and the war-mongering general Lamachus at Aristophanes' *Acharnians* 1134f.:

Lamachus: With this I'll fortify myself against the foe—

Dicaeopolis: With this I'll fortify myself against the banquet, (punning on *thōrēxomai*, 'fortify myself with a breastplate' 'get drunk').

There are intriguing glimpses of banquets that take place where we might not care to imagine them. In a comic routine in *Frogs*, we find the notion of hostelry and 'entertainments' in the Underworld, and the tale that Heracles on a previous visit

had eaten the management out of house and home and not paid his bills,⁵ to say nothing of the idea of dinners in the subterranean *prytaneion* extended to the holders of chairs in the world below. A coarse peasant humour is easy to accommodate in banquet scenes: Strepsiades in *Clouds* has the thunderclouds explained to him by Socrates—to liken them to the stuffing of broth-pudding and its dire effects at the Panathenaea.⁶

The element of fantastic as well as imaginative effort is well established in Plato's own *Symposium*: a bizarre myth about the origins of sexual orientation is appropriately assigned to Aristophanes, as a guest at the dinner in his own right, explaining the origins of homosexual and heterosexual love in the halving of double human bodies.⁷

Several mythological banquets figure as frameworks for fantasy. Foremost among them we might rank Callimachus' account of Demeter's punishment of Erysichthon, who violated the sacred grove of a nymph in order to provide timber for a banqueting-hall and is appropriately punished with an insatiable appetite:⁸

Then within his house he feasted all day long, eating all manner of countless dishes. And his wicked belly would leap up always eating more, and all the food poured down, as if into the depths of the sea, in vain and with no thanks. And like the snow on Mimas,⁹ like a wax doll in the sun, and even more than these he wasted away right to his sinews; only sinew and bone was left on the wretch. His mother wept, and again and again his two sisters gave a loud groan, and the breast that nourished him and his ten handmaidens. And even Triopas himself threw his hands on his grey hairs, beseeching the unheeding Poseidon with prayers like these: 'Look, false father, at this third generation of yours, if indeed I am the son of yourself and Canace daughter of Aeolus, but this miserable brat is my offspring: if only my hands had interred him, struck down by Apollo. But now he sits before my eyes, an ill-starred glutton. Either remove this tormenting disease from him, or take him and feed him yourself. For my tables are exhausted. My folds are bereft of livestock, my byres are already out of four-footed beasts, and already the cooks are saying there is nothing left. But they unyoked the mules from the great wagons, he ate the heifer his mother was fattening up for Hestia, and the racehorse and war-horse, and the cat¹⁰ that made the tiny vermin tremble.

Callimachus' facetious account has the air of the English children's rhyme ('I know an old lady who swallowed a horse'). But the more ominous retelling of the same tale by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* 8 picks up other possibilities. Here, Erysichthon dreams of banquets and chomps on the empty air at the beginning of his malady; when even the magical metamorphoses of his daughter fail to generate the income to keep him in food, he turns to cannibalism and augments his body by diminishing it, as fantasy shades into the grotesque.¹¹

Any fabled feasts which feature the treatment of cannibalism will be eligible for inclusion, in particular the eating of Itys in the meal by his father Tereus, where Ovid's version incorporates a grim one-liner: when Tereus calls for his son,

Procne answers *intus habes*, which can mean both ‘you have him inside’ (‘he’s inside with you’) and ‘he’s inside you’ (because you’ve just eaten him!).¹² This level of grotesqueness is picked up elsewhere. Achilles Tatius, with his taste for macabre extremes of rhetoric, has a more compressed version, wherein Tereus is depicted as overturning a table and recognizing that he is ‘father of the meal’;¹³ a similar elaboration of cannibal themes recurs in Seneca’s *Thyestes*.¹⁴

Satirists on dining

Horace offers the first Latin banquet materials that we can confidently find the measure of; much of his material in this line amounts to slapstick, as when we have rustic banter reported in an evening on the celebrated journey to Brundisium, where a host out to impress fails to do so when his fire falls out of the hearth, the meal is ruined and it is every man for himself among the guests:¹⁵

From here we made straight to Beneventum, where our attentive host had a fire as he turned some lean thrushes over the flame; the fire spread through the ancient kitchen, and Vulcan’s blaze fell apart, for the wandering flame hastened to lick the height of the roof. You could see the greedy guests and the fearful slaves grabbing at the meal and everyone wanting to put the fire out.

The juxtaposition of a prosaic word like *culinam* with the high-flown *Volcano* heightens the sense of incongruity here. And not for the first or last time, Horace is underlining the discomfort to himself on a journey where almost everything that can go wrong does so; the fact that the thrushes were lean to start with suggests that the evening was likely to have been indifferent in any case, even before disaster struck.

But all this is only a foretaste of ‘the banquet from Hell’, *Satire* 2.8, the *Cena Nasidieni*. This time the disaster is suffixed to a tiresome culinary pedantry in which the host insists on offering a running commentary on the precise preparation of each dish. It is supposed to matter that the initial boar has been caught in a soft southerly breeze, or that apples are red because picked under a waning moon.¹⁶ The guests come as close as possible to outright misbehaviour, ordering more drink than the host deems appropriate, failing to suppress their laughter and finally retreating without tasting the improvised dish their host has produced to compensate for the dishes ruined by a collapsed awning. One suspects that the host Nasidienus’ chief offence is that he is trying too hard to impress Horace’s friend and patron, Maecenas. Our attention is particularly drawn by the host to a lamprey, caught while pregnant, as after spawning the flesh is less tasty. We are given the ingredients of the sauce, with its first press of Venafran oil; liquamen derived from the gut of Spanish mackerel; five-year-old Italian wine, added in the boiling; then Chian added later, with white pepper and vinegar from Methymnaean grapes. Nasidienus claims the credit for first boiling sharp elecampane and green rockets with the sauce. Such a recital ends abruptly with the collapse of the awning; the guests have already had more than enough.

This culinary satire calls in turn on a well-trodden path of lectures on virtuosity by master-chefs, most notably Arcestratus, well represented in extended quotation by Athenaeus.¹⁷ And of course there was an actual established tradition in life, as opposed to literature, of reversing social roles at the Saturnalia, and having slaves waited upon, for however brief a duration, by their masters. But the absurd banquet par excellence can be advanced as Petronius' *Cena Trimalchionis*. Unlike the rest of the *Satyrica*, this episode has survived practically complete and might appear at first sight to be no more than a normal extravagant Roman dinner.¹⁸ However, we are forewarned. It is pointed out that Trimalchio has a clock in his dining room to tell him how much longer he has to live, and a liveried trumpeter; eccentric pretensions are the order of the day, with a distinctly morbid accent. From then on we have an increasing sense of excess, as the three hangers-on, guests of the guest Menelaus, gradually realise that this is no ordinary *Cena* but a kind of dinner-to-end-all-dinners, the ultimate over-the-top symposium. The texture of incidents is clearly maintained; there are too many guests and many too many courses; there are pranks and happenings to 'take in' the guests; there are lively but often rancid anecdotes, including a pair of ghost stories; and there is a gradual lowering of the tone to degenerate even into Trimalchio's own mock funeral. Above all, there is a constantly emerging picture of Trimalchio himself: the larger-than-life host desperate to be liked at all costs, but ominous and unnatural, capable of extreme cruelty and ultimately a purveyor of a kind of 'devil's banquet'. One incident will serve to illustrate the ethos (49):

(Trimalchio) was still going on and on, when a serving dish with a huge pig took over the table. We began to be amazed at the speed, as surely a farmyard cock could not have been cooked so quickly, all the more as the pig seemed much bigger to us than it had appeared a little earlier. Then Trimalchio looked closer and closer at it and exclaimed 'What's this, What's this? Has the pig not been gutted? So help me Heracles it hasn't been. Quick, call the chef in here'. When he stood to attention beside the table, the unhappy cook said he'd forgotten to gut it. 'What? You forgot?' exclaimed Trimalchio. 'You'd think he forgot the pepper and the cummin. Off with his clothes!' Without delay, the cook was stripped and stood wretchedly between two torturers. But everyone started to plead on his behalf and say: 'It does happen, we ask you to let him go; if he does it again, none of us will plead on his behalf'. I for my part reacted with the utmost cruelty; I couldn't contain myself but whispered in Agamemnon's ear: 'Surely', I said, 'this must be the worst of slaves. Would anyone forget to gut a pig? I shouldn't to goodness let him off, if he didn't gut a fish'. But not Trimalchio, who relaxed his expression and began to laugh. 'So since you've such a bad memory, gut it in front of us'. Back in his tunic the cook seized a knife and with a trembling hand cut the pig's belly this way and that, And immediately as the cuts widened with the pressure of weight sausages and blood-puddings poured out.

The extraordinary notion that an un-gutted pig has been served, and the impending punishment of the slave in front of the guests, build up a sense of embarrassed disbelief, fully realised in Encolpius' reactions—till all is transformed in an instant into a ponderous party trick.

That episode underlines the suspicion that Trimalchio is in league with his establishment of slaves against the unwary guests who are taken in time after time. He himself is an ex-slave and at times has a corresponding sympathy with the underdog. Late in the course of the dinner, slaves are invited to join the master at the table, turning the whole business into something like a Saturnalian banquet.

There is a degree of overlap between some of the incidents in Petronius and the sort of incidents that take place at the philosopher Xanthus' banquet in the *Aesop-Romance*. The philosopher invites his fellows for a meal and sends Aesop on ahead to make pea soup—which he duly makes, but quite literally with only one pea; or the guests are shocked to find that Aesop has exposed his host's wife asleep on the couch by uncovering her backside, because she had boasted that she had a nether eye and he is enabling her to keep an eye on things; or, most ludicrous of all, Xanthus in his cups boasts that he can drink the sea, and Aesop has to get him out of his wager by restricting the bet to the sea itself, without the addition of rivers.¹⁹

Both Juvenal and Lucian produce distortions of the banquet, never quite with the richness of Petronius, but continually redeploying similar situations. Juvenal's caricatures are exaggerations of a well-authenticated social situation where his nouveau-riche host contrives repeated humiliations for his socially superior but down-at-heel clients, forced in effect to sing for their supper. A prominent weapon is malicious exaggeration:²⁰

But what a dinner! Your wine will not suck up wool-clippings ... Your host Virro drinks wine laid down when a consul wore his hair long. He holds in his hand wine from grapes trod in the Social Wars; but he will never send a measure of it to a friend with heart trouble ... Virro holds huge goblets encrusted with amber or burgeoning with beryl. He does not entrust you with gold, or if he does, there is a guard posted with it to count the jewels and note your sharp fingernails ... Your cracked cup has the name of a Beneventan cobbler; you will drain it as it calls out for sulphur to mend its broken glass.

And so the contrasting inventories go on: Virro's fruit might have come from the Phaeacian orchards or the Hesperides, while his hapless client has a rotten apple fit for a performing monkey ...

Lucian's *de Mercede Conductis* covers much the same ground with a distinctively Greek nuance, while the basic tension between guests and host is well presented at a purely realistic level in the Younger Pliny's correspondence (a tententious host 'grades' the food and wine for his guests, and by so doing in effect grades the guests themselves).²¹ Lucian's own *Symposium* uses a different kind of social inversion: here the guests under scrutiny are philosophers who compromise their much-prized principles. After a cumulative sequence of malicious remarks

and disreputable incidents, we find chaos and shame when the lights go up.²² But the 'realistic' topos of the drunken brawl is exaggerated to the mythical level; even Lucian's subtitle at the very outset takes us back to the murderous marriage-feast where the Centaurs are maddened by drink and fight the Lapiths.

Perhaps the most grotesque banquet of all is that in Lucian's *Lexiphanes*, summed up by its amazing eponymous narrator: *Antisymposiazō tou Aristōnos* 'I am counter-banqueting the son of Ariston'—in plain language, 'I am producing a composition to rival Plato's *Symposium*'. And indeed the event matches the description in the most bizarre manner:²³

'Let us be drinking, then', quoth Megalonymus, 'for I am come bringing you this senile flagon, green cheese, windfallen olives—I keep them under worm-scruen seals—and other olives, soused, and those earthen cups of cockle-shell, stanchly bottomed, for us to drink out of, and a cake of chitterlings braided like a topknot ...

In a totally different vein again from this perverse gobbledegook, the most literal chaos is wished upon the rich by the poor in Lucian's *Saturnalia* (23):

Let (the rich) enjoy their festival, while we sit on our backsides praying that when they come from the bath, the slave-boy will upset the amphora and break it over them, the cook will burn the soup and forgetting what he's doing pitch the fish into the pudding; and that the dog will dash in and eat all the sausages while the cooks are otherwise engaged, together with half the cake. And as we pray the pig and the venison and the sucking pigs while being cooked do the same, as Homer said about the cattle of the sun, or rather not just that they crawl but leap up and run off to the mountain, spits and all; and that the game birds, even though without their plumage and all ready to serve, should take wing and go off so that they cannot enjoy them on their own.

At the opposite extreme, the motif of a kind of fairy-tale symposium occurs on the Island of the Blest in *Verae Historiae*, where the winds are able to act as waiters, and there are self-filling wine-glasses—the fruits of the glass-trees, unsurprisingly—and where the winds are able to scatter the perfumed clouds over the banquet. One thinks also of the almost contemporary account of the invisible servants serving their mistress in Apuleius' *Cupid and Psyche*.²⁴ On the Isle of the Blessed, Homer is of course able to provide the after-dinner recitation in person, and an expected gathering of the great and the good is able to attend, including representatives of the philosophical schools as well as mythological heroes; comparison is worthwhile with the repertoire of recitation in *Icaromenippus*, where Menippus has been able to attend a symposium in heaven itself, and the repertoire favoured by the gods naturally includes Hesiod's *Theogony*.

Sophistic literature also developed the interest in parasites which belonged so conspicuously to Middle and New Comedy. Alciphron's parasites maintain a lively but bizarre correspondence about their mishaps and humiliations at dinner,

once more taking up the typical topics of Juvenal Satire 5, and luxuriating in their own bizarrely inventive names ('Laemocyclops to Creolobes').²⁵

A peculiar product, apparently in a class of its own and still a puzzle to scholars, is Juvenal's Satire 4. The bulk is taken up with an account not of a meal as such, but of a *concilium principis* of the Emperor Domitian and his advisers, where the only matter under discussion, however, is what to do with an enormous turbot presented to the Emperor. An ominous catalogue of sinister hangers-on is enumerated before the decision is finally given to cut the fish. The piece might be read as the bitter reporting of a possible actual event—it was indeed customary to make presents of unusual discoveries and the like to the emperor—but there may well also be a literary exaggeration of a popular folkloric joke here. We have modern examples where a massive object has to be countered with some counterpart: one character might report an enormous cabbage; the other will give an account of something even bigger—the vessel in which to cook it (or the like).²⁶ Here, we seem well on the way to such a joke.

Other unexpected symposium themes emerge from time to time, in particular the notion that a symposium, like a love-affair, is some kind of military operation; so Alciphron (3.9):

(Trapezoleictes to Psychodialectes) ('Table-Licker to Crumb-discusser', Benner and Fobes)

If it happened as Leirione reported when she returned from the party (I'm talking about the attendant of Phyllis the harp-player), you underwent a war and a siege, without a siege-engine and siege-tower. For I hear that effeminate fellow and womanish creature smashed the cup into your face ...

Lucian's *Symposium*, indeed, manages a literal battle between philosophers when the whole business has degenerated into a brawl:²⁷

Zenothemis, I say, ignored his own bird, and laid hands on Hermon's, which he claimed was fatter. But Hermon took hold of it in turn and would not let him have more than his share. There was a shout at this and falling on one another they exchanged blows in the face with the actual birds, and taking hold of each other's beards they called for help; Hermon called on Cleodemus and Zenothemis on Alcidamas and Diphilus ... And the women set up a lament, gathered round Chaereas ...

In fact, the relationship between Lucian's *Symposium* and Alciphron gives us the opportunity to look at fantastic invention in operation. There is general suspicion that Alciphron in his *Parasite's Letters*, especially 3.19, is drawing on Lucian and possibly Old Comic sources. In his much more elongated *Symposium*, Lucian makes the point in passing that the ordinary, humble guests are the ones behaving well while the philosophers disgrace themselves (34f.); that becomes the main theme of Alciphron's piece. The latter has a similar roll-call of philosophers; he seems to obtain his variation from Lucian, partly by adopting a

new set of names and partly by developing slightly more detailed descriptions. Alciphron's Stoic Eteocles is 'the old man, with the beard calling for a trimming, the dirty fellow with the unkempt head, well on in years, with a brow with more wrinkles than his purse' (19.2); Lucian had provided Zenothemis and Diphilus 'the labyrinth'. Again, Lucian's Cynic Alcidas exposes himself, while both he and Alciphron's Cynic Pancrates urinate in front of the other guests. Both misbehave towards the flute-girl; Alciphron gives a more detailed description of the Cynic's club while Lucian's simply has a stave; Alciphron's Cynic adds the quasi-philosophic sentiment that nature is the prime cause of generation. The final observation brings the account round to the detail that would interest a fellow-parasite: that the philosophers have usurped the attention normally accorded to the parasites themselves (19.9).

In the remainder of the *Parasites' Letters*, Alciphron has a free hand to develop expected and unexpected symposiac situations. Many of these, told as they are from a parasite's point of view, relate to the tortures and humiliations that others impose on a hapless correspondent, others to intrigues with courtesans to please their masters, arrests by vindictive puritans or attempts at robbery of the wealth and goods at symposia. We find a banquet to celebrate a dramatic victory, parasites minded to top themselves after one last luxurious meal, and the rest ...²⁸

Food and philology remain the twin staples of the banquet as a genre, but most writers will emphasise one at the expense of the other. It might be suggested that Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae* represents a fantasy dinner in some sense. The diners hold forth with amazing memories and almost unnatural erudition on any topic connected with symposia, and there is a sense of straining the form to the limit; it is hard to see how the original conception could have been regarded as 'readable' in any ordinary sense. This is where to find the most exhaustive collection of extracts on courtesans or fishcakes—to take Davidson's memorable title.

A more effective 'symposiac' theme in literary terms is Lucian's specialist parody on the art of the Parasite itself. The parasite Simon in this instance proves to be very well read, naturally knowing the parts of Homer or Plato to do with cookery and banqueting, in particular the gastronomic verses relating to Odysseus enjoying the hospitality of the Phaeacians.²⁹ But it is Athenaeus himself who provides the best single titbit of fantastic feasting (2.37b–e):³⁰

Timaeus of Tauromenium says that in Acragas there is a house called 'The Trireme' for the following reason. Some young men that were drinking there got so madly inebriated as to imagine they were sailing on a trireme and were caught in a bad storm on the sea; and they were so far out of their mind as to throw everything from the house, all the furniture and bedclothes as if at sea: they thought the pilot ordered them to lighten the ship because of the storm. A huge crowd gathered and started looting all that had been thrown overboard, and not even then did the young fellows abandon their madness; and the next day the military authorities appeared at the house and brought charges, when they were still inebriated; the youths replied to the magistrates that beset by the storm they were forced to lighten the ship by

jettisoning the superfluous cargo. As the military were amazed at their madness one of the youths, who seemed to be older than the rest, said 'I was so frightened, Tritons, that I threw myself down to the bottom of the hold and lay down there'. The authorities gave them a pardon for their madness and sentencing them not to drink too much wine let them go. They gave a grateful promise ... 'should we be lucky enough to escape this flood we will set up altars in your honour together with the sea gods in our country, since you appeared to us at such a fateful moment'. That was why the house was known as 'The Trireme'.

Thus far, then, a foretaste only of the directions in which unusual symposia can be imagined or even fantasised. It should be emphasised that as so often what we can find, especially in Athenaeus, seems only a fraction of what must have been lost.

Plutarch's Banquet of the Seven Sages

It might have been expected that Plutarch's symposium piece *The Banquet of the Seven Sages*³¹ would turn out a rather staid and sober affair by comparison with so many of the above examples, and that the author of so much *Table Talk* and so many *Symposiac Questions* would incline heavily to the more serious side of symposium possibilities. This is indeed the case, as the traditional sages address themselves to precepts for rulers and the nature of despotism, much of it packaged in a gnomic style appropriate to the most ancient of 'wisdom' sayings. But two episodes stand out for their fantastic content, strategically placed close to the beginning and end of the dialogue. In the first case, Thales is confronted by an amazing portent (149Cff.):

There was a young man, apparently a herdsman; he had not yet grown a beard, and was quite good-looking. He unfastened a leather pouch and showed us a baby he said was the offspring of a mare; down to the neck and arms it was human, but the rest was horse; its cry was that of a new-born human ... Thales left me and taking (Periander's) hand he said, 'What Diocles instructs you, you must do in due course. But I advise you not to employ young men to herd horses, or to give them wives'.

(cf. Phaedrus *Fab.* 3.3)

The conclusion of the dialogue begins with an extended narration by Periander's newly arrived brother Gorgus of the story of Arion, as a real event actually taking place and still unfolding before the eyes of the guests (160Fff.):

Before it was possible to guess what was coming upon them with such speed, dolphins appeared, some following a tight circle, others giving a lead to the most level part of the shore, others behind like a rear-guard. And in their midst above the waves was a mass, not clear and distinct, of a body being carried along, until coming together and coming close inshore they put out on

land a man still breathing and capable of movement. Then the dolphins withdrew again to the promontory and leapt higher than before, playing in pleasure so it seemed and jumping high ... And they recognised the harpist Arion, who gave them his name himself, and was recognisable by his dress, for he happened to be wearing the competition robes he wore when performing.

Plutarch takes the opportunity to alter a number of the details that have attached to the Arion-legend since the standard version found in Herodotus 1. Notably, there is no direct confrontation between the Corinthian crew who have planned to murder Arion and the bard himself; his final performance is presented as a personal impulse of his own, without his betraying any awareness of the plan to kill him. And the idea of a whole school of escorting dolphins replaces the normal single dolphin of the story. The detail no doubt appealed to Plutarch as a keen student of instinct in animals. But it also underlines the sense of fantasy carefully linked to the real court of Periander and references to the recent invention of the dithyramb, which was credited to Arion himself. One notes, too, the embellishment of the star-studded sky, the rising moon and the sense that the eye of justice is protecting the bard.

Conclusions

The symposium, then, is a natural framework for fantastic situations; many attach to the satirical treatment of the gourmet and his likely comeuppance, but unusual happenings from the joke on the un-gutted pig to the arrival of Arion rescued by dolphins can be readily fitted in. We have an account of a symposium in Hyperattic nonsense, philosophic banquets turned on their heads or parasites and courtesans usurping the limelight. All that is required of the genre is surprise and the defeat of 'normal' expectation.

Notes

- 1 For the role of food in Fantasy literature in general, Westfahl, G., Slusser, G., and Rabkin, E.S. (edd.), 1996.
- 2 For courtesans at symposia, McClure (2003).
- 3 For the nature of the genre, see still J. Martin, *Symposion*, (1931); O. Murray, *Symptotica* (1990). For gastronomy, Dalby (1996); on the Roman side, Gowers (1993); on Athenaeus, Braund and Wilkins (2000).
- 4 E.g. *Acharnians* 1085–1149; *Peace* 909–1357.
- 5 *Frogs* 549–578.
- 6 *Clouds* 385–391.
- 7 *Symposium* 189D–192A.
- 8 *Hymn* 6.66ff.
- 9 Proverbially inhospitable: the shoals and shallows extend from Tunisia to Cyrenaica. See Pliny *NH* 5.26–41: the lotus-eaters were also localised here.
- 10 By a deliberate anti-climax.
- 11 *Met.* 8.823–878.
- 12 *Met.* 6.651–655.
- 13 Achilles Tatius 5.3.8; 5.5.8.

110 *Bizarre banquets, topsy-turvy tables*

- 14 *Thyestes* 1035–1040. See also c.5 above.
- 15 *Satires* 1.5.71–76.
- 16 For detailed culinary commentary, Rudd (1966), 202–223.
- 17 For Athenaeus and his sources, Wilkins (1995), 429–438; (2000), 523–535.
- 18 For detailed analysis, Walsh (Cambridge, 1970), 111–140; Commentary by M.S. Smith (1975); G. Schmeling (2011) on 26.7–78; for the boastful chef as a type, Wilkins (2000).
- 19 *Life of Aesop* 41; 77a; 69–73.
- 20 *Satire* 5.24–48.
- 21 Lucian, *de Mercede Conductis passim*; Pliny, *Ep.* 2.6.1f.
- 22 Lucian, *Symp.* 46, cf. Alciphron, *Ep.* 3.19.8f.
- 23 E.g. *Lexiphanes* 13 (in Harmon's deliberately mannered translation).
- 24 Lucian, *VH* 2.014; Apuleius, *Met.* 5.3.
- 25 'Cyclops-gullet to Meal-maimer', Benner and Fobes.
- 26 Folkloric examples in Aarne-Thompson-Uther (2004) Type 1960.
- 27 Lucian, *Symp.* 43f.
- 28 We have noted that Lucian's *Symposium* is subtitled *The Lapiths*, referring to the classic brawl at which Lapiths and Centaurs fought it out at the banquet of Pirithous and Hippodame. The most ambitious presentation is to be found in Ovid's version in *Metamorphoses* 12. 210–535, reverting to Epic scale and pretension.
- 29 Homer, *Odyssey* 9.5–10 (Lucian, *De Parasito* 10).
- 30 Athenaeus 2.37b–e.
- 31 Discussion by J. Mossman (1997), 119–140.

9 Planting the phallus

Sexual fantasy

We do not have the materials to explore the sexual psychology of the Ancient World—the patient is simply not available for interview—nor do sexual attitudes have much chance to reflect themselves in the very limited kinds of literature which survive. What we do have, however, is a rich vein of sexual themes of a largely literary kind, rather than a stream of symbols, and the whole subject can have religious sanction wholly foreign to subsequent Christian tradition.

The influence of Ancient Near Eastern mythology provides several situations which prove difficult to recapture in the classical period. Hesiod recounts the cosmic myth of the earth covered by the sky, and forced to keep her children in the womb. She persuades one of them, Cronos, to castrate his father, which he does from a hiding-place, presumably during the intercourse of sky and earth.¹ The episode is probably not just a borrowing by Hesiod; he adds the detail that giants spring forth from the blood, but also that Aphrodite springs from the foam when the genitals are cast into the sea.² The whole myth is aetiological, explaining separation of earth and sky and the origins of Aphrodite's name (<*aphros*, foam), but Hesiod has transfigured primitive myth into poetic fantasy. Of similar origin is Herodotus' account of the dream of Astyages; the king dreams that a vine grows from his wife's womb and spreads all over Asia.³ Cosmic myth can spread even into historiography.

Moreover, the idea of sexual themes at a mythical level does not remain within the confines of primitive wisdom. It subsists at a popular level, when clever mythical explanations are to be sought, for example, for sexual orientations or the shape of sexual anatomy. It is in such a context that we should consider the celebrated myth Plato gives to Aristophanes in the *Symposium*:⁴

At first humans are born double, with genital organs facing outward, and procreation takes place with the earth. There are three sexes, male and female, each with two sets of similar organs, and hermaphrodite, with one set of each. Zeus splits the pairs and rearranges their anatomy so that head and genitals face the front, and each now goes in search of their other halves, so that the hermaphrodites account for heterosexual pairings, and the split of the identically sexed doubles accounts for male homosexuals and Lesbians.

Old Comedy itself revelled in inventive obscenity, which grew naturally out of the fertility element in the ritual origins of drama. Actors could themselves wear gigantic genitals as a relic of phallic processions. Aristophanes wrote a (lost) play with the mind-boggling title *Triphalloi*; and when the assembly of women try to detect the male impostor Mnesilochus, and he attempts to conceal the evidence of his masculinity, its movements are compared to those of a cargo dragged back and forward across the Isthmus of Corinth.⁵ Comedy could readily be stretched to include obscene fantasy.

Sometimes the sexual suggestion of a comic scene has not been immediately recognised. It took Kenneth Dover to realise that in the debate of the two *Logoi* in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, the Dikaioi Logos is the one who has something of a leering approach to the boys in the gymnasium, noticing their smoothing the imprint of their genitals when they rise from the sand.⁶ Sometimes the focus of an obscene joke has seemed not entirely clear. In Aristophanes' *Frogs*, several of Euripides' prologues are tested, and it is found that the sense of each of them is completed by Aeschylus' adding the phrase *lēkythion apōlesen* ('lost his little bottle of oil'). This has sometimes been taken as no more than a demonstration of Euripides' metrical predictability, but that is not the whole story. Each time this happens, there is some kind of anti-climax to the sense, as in:⁷

Euripides: Oeneus, once raising his stalk of many measures and sacrificing the first-fruits

Aeschylus: —lost his little bottle of oil.

The joke works well if we take the many-measured stalk as his penis and the oil-flask as his testicles. The idea is that Aeschylus can deftly castrate Euripides' pretentious prologues with a trivial phrase. In some cases, the gender wars can be presented in a less overtly sexual way: one thinks of Lysistrata's scheme for women to work politics as they work wool.⁸

It might be felt that when Aristophanes' subject is most directly sexual, there is actually very little fantastic invention, as in both the *Lysistrata* and the *Ecclesiazousai*. Here the novelty lies in what for the man in the Athenian street was social fantasy: women on sex-strike, or women legislating on sexual controls, forcing young men to submit to the overtures of much older women. Yet fantastic invention is all the more striking when it does appear. Although the bedroom scene between Cinesias and Myrrhina in *Lysistrata* uses none, the sex-starved ambassadors try to explain their monstrous erections in terms of a herald's rod or *skytalē*,⁹ a highly effective visual joke, and the peace negotiations over the map of Greece also take on a distinctly sexual flavour: 'Reconciliation' is portrayed as a young woman to be divided between the warring parties, with the maximum of innuendo.¹⁰

The world of the Priapeia

A minor genre, of poems in honour of the fertility god Priapus, largely depends on sexual fantasy. We have a substantial surviving corpus of *Priapeia* in Latin

numbering some 80 short items of mainly epigram length, and a number of epigrams in Greek from the Palatine Anthology and elsewhere, with some other items related to Priapus in Latin poetry.

Some Priapic material simply relates to routine and unremarkable features of the genuine cult of Priapus as a patron of sailors, a function related no doubt to his connexion with the coastal town of Lampsacus; or of farmers and horticulturalists, where dedicatory epigrams of a conventional type are found.¹¹ These might offer gifts of apples, without any obvious obscene underscoring, and modest rewards for the god's services, including sacrifice of a pig.¹² The fantastic motifs, on the other hand, are associated with the gigantic dimensions of the god's phallus. This in turn naturally relates to his function as a fertility deity and occurs on apotropaic charms and the like. But it also affords scope for fantastic literary situations: a typical scenario has the god guarding an orchard and threatening to punish thieves with his enormous member, most obviously by buggery, but sometimes with oral sex. The variations easily proliferate: he will bugger for a first offence, fellate his victim for a second, apply both penalties for a third;¹³ poets who fail to produce lascivious verses he will inflict with piles.¹⁴ But other situations readily suggest themselves. Sometimes the god will do a deal: he will give his garden fruit to the thief in return for the sexual favour that comes most easily to him.¹⁵ Latin and Greek both allow a pun on figs—literal figs from the fig-tree in return for the sexual figs (either arse or cunt) of the thief.¹⁶ Or the thieves themselves are attracted by the punishment, not always with Priapus' co-operation.¹⁷ Although he warns off chaste women, still they come; a lascivious dancer, Telethousa, will turn him on.¹⁸ On the other hand, the god reserves the right to refuse the enthusiastic attentions of aged women, though in the last case his services may still be available for a fee.¹⁹ Nor does he care for the revoltingly diseased (*CP* 46); here we are in the same territory as poems like Horace *Epodes* 8 and 12,²⁰ where the poet himself spurns the unwelcome attentions of hags with insults. Priapus even finds that the attentions of so many enthusiastic women are wearing him out, or that thieves have stolen his sickle and he is worried for his own member,²¹ making him a Gaul (punning on *gallus*, eunuch) rather than a Lampsacene. However, elsewhere, the lack of nymphs forces him to resort to masturbation, or he is the worse for being out in all weathers, or frustrated when a fence keeps out the thieves and robs him of his victims;²² or the poet's own member is even larger than that of his subject.²³ Following the dedicatory theme, we find a circus dancer who is able to dedicate items relating to her profession to the god in the hope that he will keep her audience sexually taut, or a whore who will dedicate as many willow rods as she has had men in a night;²⁴ a retired Suburran whore will hang the god's prick with a gilded garland, or a male client of Priapus promises a garland if a flirtatious girl will comply.²⁵ Again, in the manner of medical miracles, a man cured by Priapus offers him a picture of his restored penis.²⁶

Priapus can also have fun with his own ambiguous identity: on the one hand a god, on the other, an (often crudely) carved block of wood, sometimes in the form merely of a herm, with bust and projecting phallus only. This provides the opening for Horace's satirical tale in *Satire* 1.8, where the carver has to decide

whether to use his wood to make a bench or a god, and having been carved as a god, Priapus reports an incident in that capacity;²⁷ meanwhile, girls too modest to look at his member still long for it.²⁸

All manner of literary variation is possible. The dedicatee affects to inscribe his poem on Priapus' temple wall (in fact the pages of his own book), but he does not summon the Muses, too chaste to be so close to Priapus' member.²⁹ He finds elaborate circumlocutions before speaking plainly *da paedicare* (let me have you from behind).³⁰ A girl called Lalage invites Priapus to join her in the sex positions illustrated in a book by Elephantis, or to look on while another girl expects her partner to perform all the positions in the female pornographer Philaenis.³¹ Again first letters of proper names will spell out a thief's punishment: Pe(nelope); Di(do); Ca(dmus); Re(mus).³² Or there is a pun on *testes* 'testicles'/witnesses' to the shame of anyone punished by Priapus.³³

In more ambitious literary vein, Poem 68 in the extant *Priapeia* shows the possibilities of the genre for fantastic parody. At 38 lines, it is the most extensive item in the Latin *Priapeia*. Priapus apologises for his rusticity; fruit is his business, not books, but he has heard his master reciting Homer aloud, and so he knows Homeric terms for *prick*, *arse* and *foul*. He now reviews the two Homeric poems in terms of his own restricted viewpoint: if Helen's cunt had not fancied Paris' prick, then there would have been no Epic, nor if Agamemnon's member had not been so egregious would Chryses have had anything to complain about, and Achilles would have kept his mistress. The analysis of the *Odyssey* is more surprising: *moly* is interpreted as *mentula* (prick); by implication, it was Odysseus' weapon that protected him from Circe.³⁴ The greatest novelty is the interpretation of Nausicaa: she was amazed at the size of Odysseus' endowment, unconcealed by a branch; Penelope is concerned not with the drawing of a taut bow, but by a natural pun in Greek by the tautest erection among the suitors.³⁵ Finally, Priapus bewails that he was not there to stand in for Odysseus, not yet having been made. For all his rusticity, then, Priapus is a true scholar in his own field of expertise.

The god has plenty to say about his egregious member other than its size. All other gods flaunt their weapons (thunderbolt, trident and the rest); why should not Priapus display his?³⁶ His member is/is not a work of Phidias,³⁷ or he enumerates it with his other weapons, a sickle and a stick;³⁸ he will bugger a boy, screw a girl and fellate a bearded offender;³⁹ or people can come from intercourse to Priapus, while they cannot approach other gods without purification.⁴⁰ Priapus can, however, punish with other penalties, wishing a thief no sexual fulfilment,⁴¹ the kind of curse developed to great effect in Petronius' *Satyricon*.⁴² Ingenious parody is possible, as when Priapus' staff that will never bear leaf evokes the celebrated staff of Achilles in the *Iliad*.⁴³ Or, fantastically, the penetration caused by Priapus will allow a lady to pass through her own backside.⁴⁴ On the other hand, his prick is only of wood, but he'll tell his master, who will fellate the thief in his stead.⁴⁵

Some *Priapeia* seem inventive but textually uncertain, as in Priapus' *bon mot* about a boy who curls his hair like a Negro girl,⁴⁶ in *CP* 52, thieves are threatened with some kind of threefold penetration, perhaps by Priapus and two *priapisci*;⁴⁷ the garden is guarded by Sirius and Erigone, though their Priapic role

is not altogether clear;⁴⁸ or there is a pun, its context uncertain, on *māla* (fruits, metrically long) and *mala* (ills, metrically short).⁴⁹ Or though old, Priapus can still penetrate aged heroes (Tithonus, Priam, Nestor).⁵⁰ In one case, a fruit tree complains that its barrenness is due to its having been overloaded with bad verses (presumably in honour of Priapus himself).⁵¹

Priapic material and viewpoint are also to be found over a much wider range of material than the poems that are strictly *Priapeia* in their own right. The example by Horace at *Satire* 1.8 is unusual and perhaps a little elusive. There is a conventional Priapic introduction (the master had to decide whether to make a god or a bench with the wood, and he decided on a god). Now in position as a guardian, the Priapus complains that the former cemetery he is set to guard is plundered by two disreputable witches, Canidia and Sagana, and he boasts of how he put the ghastly pair to flight with a timely (but involuntary) fart; here there seems the surprise that Priapus is not using his normal resource to put the witches to flight (presumably they would be the last candidates he would wish to threaten). Tibullus 1.4 also has Priapus in an unusual role, this time as a counsellor on how to seduce a boy. Ovid, too, twice recounts a situation where Priapus, after a banquet of the gods, is set to ravish the nymph Lotis or even the goddess Vesta, but Silenus' ass raises the alarm and hence the ass becomes a sacrifice to Priapus.⁵² Unusual also is the Martial epigram where the thief Cilix steals from a garden the marble Priapus himself.⁵³ Or the ultimate indignity will be that Priapus, made of wood, if he fails to stop the theft of wood from the garden, will himself be burned on the master's fire.⁵⁴ Again, pastry Priapuses can be eaten without committing any impure act.⁵⁵ And Prudentius from his Christian perspective chooses to euhemerise the god: he was once a rake who ran riot seducing the country girls, before his rites came from the Hellespont to Italy.⁵⁶

Much of Petronius' *Satyrical* also has Priapus in the background, as the anti-hero Encolpius finds himself dogged by sexual misfortune after he has somehow incurred the *gravis ira Priapi*. His punishment seems time and again to be impotence at a critical moment, and attempts to regain his manhood come in increasingly grotesque situations, as when he undergoes the ministrations to two tipsy old witches, only once more to kill the sacred goose of Priapus himself.⁵⁷ In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus' nurse had recognised the hero by his scar; Encolpius' former patron Lichas recognises his friend by his genitals.⁵⁸ None of this is mere prurience; the author has ensured that the originals will never be quite the same again.

Ancient art reveals frequent instances of phallic inventiveness. Imaginative sexual postures abound, not necessarily always practical. Especially noteworthy is the depiction of a satyr balancing a wine-cup on the tip of his phallus.⁵⁹ No less striking is the Pompeian wall-painting of Priapus weighing his ample member in a balance.⁶⁰ Sometimes the animal world is the basis for invention, as in the vase-painting of a horse with a phallus instead of a head, or a boy riding a swan whose phallus-shaped neck emanates from the rider's groin,⁶¹ or a bird of any kind can be endowed with a phallus-shaped neck and head.⁶² A phallus-bird may be presented as an athlete, complete with aryballos and sponge.⁶³ And there are further possibilities: a woman may tend phalloi growing out of the ground; one thinks of the

Arboreals, with their phalloi being raised as plants in Lucian's *Verae Historiae*.⁶⁴ Or a woman may be depicted facing a figure-length phallus, or carrying an out-size one.⁶⁵ Sometimes further context seems to be required, as when a woman is painted leaping into a basket full of dildos or phalloi.⁶⁶

Erotic material does not always require Priapus' emphasis on sexual anatomy. The whimsical use of Cupid, either singular or plural, can serve in any number of imaginative scenarios; one thinks especially of Moschus *Idyll* 1, where Aphrodite has her delinquent son cried as a runaway (*erōs drapetēs*), to be approached with caution because of his deadly arrows.⁶⁷ But roles can be reversed: one thinks of the situation in Propertius 2.29, where the errant poet, apparently out on the town, finds himself surrounded by a squad of the little imps, who escort him back to his mistress's door and let him off only this once.⁶⁸ A further resource of fantasy is the so-called *paraclausithyron*, in which the lover is imagined as serenading the mistress' closed door. In the most extreme of variations (Propertius 1.16), we have the door itself talking to the reader and complaining about having to listen to the perpetual complaint of a lover, a contrast to its former role as the door of a noble and distinguished household.⁶⁹ In Catullus 67, the talking door turns out by contrast to be an obscurely salacious gossip.

Further sexual inventions

Lucian succeeds in importing sexual fantasy with some subtle restraints. In *Verae Historiae*, we have a good deal of sexual nuance among the wonders of travellers' tales in foreign climes⁷⁰ (1.8):

Then ... we found an amazing sort of grape-vine, for the part that came from the earth, the actual trunk, was robust and thick, but the part above was woman, all perfectly formed from the waist upwards. In our country painters depict Daphne changing to a tree as Apollo is taking hold of her. And branches grew from their finger-tips and these were full of grapes. And the hairs of their heads were vine-tendrils and leaves and grape-clusters. They greeted us when we approached and welcomed us, some in Lydian, some in Indian, but most of them speaking Greek. And they kissed us on the lips, and when a man was kissed he was immediately intoxicated and blind drunk. But they would not allow us to pick their fruit, and showed pain and moaned if we plucked it. Some of them even wanted to have sex with us; and two of my companions did so, but were unable to extricate themselves, being stuck fast by their genitals; for they had grown into them and taken root. And already their fingers had sprouted branches, they were entwined with tendrils, and they themselves were just about to bear fruit. We left them and fled back to the ship.

The vine-women seem to offer an amalgam of a variety of exotic literary and extra-literary reference, locking passing sailors quite literally in their amorous embraces.⁷¹ They protest at Lucian's men's attempts to pluck the fruit; one thinks

of the Indian trees Alexander attempts to cut into, which are protected by invisible forces.⁷² Or one thinks most immediately in Homeric terms of the Sirens and Circe, but that is only the beginning. Similar predatory females are to be found in the Ass-legs,⁷³ and amid the bizarre creatures in the war between Sun and Moon, we have the ‘ball-cock batteries’ (*kunobalanoi*), and inside the whale, the none too easily elucidated *tritōnomendētes*.⁷⁴ The Moonites’ normal (!) development is to play the female role till the age of 25, then to act as males thereafter. But they also have the aforementioned Arboreals, whose right testicle is planted in the ground, from which grows a penis-tree, bearing acorns which produce men. Intercourse on the moon takes place through an aperture in the fold of the knee. Some of the creatures offer playful variations: there are phallonauts who use their penises as masts on which they can suspend a sail to catch the wind, so that they are both sailors and ships at one and the same time.⁷⁵

Nor do such creatures confine themselves to the surreal regions round the moon. Lucian describes a domestic sexual orgy where his enemy is re-enacting the blinding of the Cyclops by Odysseus, but the stake is the drunken offender’s member, and it finds its way into the Cyclops’ mouth rather than his eye.⁷⁶

These oddities have at least been noticed, but a whole Lucianic dialogue has largely escaped attention. In the *Lexiphanes*, we have whole screeds of bizarrely unusual coinages and verbal abusages, spouted by the over-affected Lexiphanes, to whom they represent the very apogée of good taste. What seems not to have been appreciated is that chapter after chapter is replete with strangely suggestive doubles entendres, so that verbal and sexual aberration are made to go together.⁷⁷

Again, as in Aristophanes, there are less literal absurdities, most prominently in Lucian’s *Eunuchus*, where we find the tale of an adulterer who affects to be a eunuch to escape a charge of adultery. This lands him in the dilemma where a eunuch is not deemed worthy of a chair of philosophy because he is unnatural; does he claim to be sexually normal and so incur the charge of adultery, or does he escape the latter and disqualify himself as unnatural?⁷⁸ Lucian elects to remain artfully inconclusive.

Apuleius as often achieves a still more bizarre effect. In his life as an ass in the *Metamorphoses*, his protagonist Lucius is rather puritanical, yet the forces of evil conspire to force him to the most ghastly enormities—not only repeated beatings, threats of castration, and unnatural intercourse; he is to display his prowess with a condemned woman in the arena, or to be gutted so that a pure virgin can be sewn up inside his carcase and exposed to the vultures.⁷⁹

In the case of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* and its Greek analogue, we can see alternative accounts at work for an explicit sexual encounter as Lucius seduces the witch’s maid as a prelude to magical experiment. The Greek *Onos*-author has given the maid the name Palaestra, and the general ethos is that of the wrestling-ground where she is the instructor:⁸⁰

(Palaestra) stripped off and standing completely naked began her orders from that point: ‘Off with your clothes, my lad, rub on some of the ointment over there, and close with your antagonist; take hold of me by both thighs and lay

me on my back, then having got on top slip through my thighs to open me up, with your legs kept above me ...'

Apuleius in Latin chooses a military rather than gymnastic metaphor:⁸¹

She stripped off her clothes and let her hair down ... 'Do battle', she said, and fight bravely: for I will not yield to you or turn my back. Come to close quarters and make your frontal attack, if you are a real man, and make a spirited attack and make your kill, as you are about to die. Today's fight offers no quarter ...'

At the opposite end of the scale, some fantastic treatments of sex can be found in folk humour. The so-called *Life of Aesop* contains an episode that combines comic exaggeration with sexual double entendre:⁸²

Aesop's master's wife is taken with the size of the slave's enormous member and offers him a shirt if he will sleep with her ten times in a row. He performs his task successfully the first nine times, but on the tenth the semen reaches only her backside; she refuses to pay up. Aesop reports the matter to his master, saying that the wife had promised him a shirt if he could knock ten apples off a tree; the tenth had fallen into a manure pile. The simple cuckold Xanthus orders Aesop to knock off another apple and be given the shirt.

Not only does Aesop produce an amazing performance, but he deceives his master with a clever euphemism, with intercourse symbolised by knocking apples from a tree. The flavour matches that of the novella in Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale* and other medieval analogues, where the lovers knock fruit down from a tree and once more deceive the cuckolded husband with a smart explanation.

One striking example of a sex scene deserves to be excluded from the record: the event in the last dream of the Christian martyr Perpetua. She finds herself in the arena ready to contest against an Egyptian in a wrestling match; she is stripped naked, but then changes sex before going on to win the wrestling match and take the trophy of golden apples. The episode seems not designed to titillate so much as to give the martyr the right sex for a wrestler. She must be stripped simply to make the sex-change clearly visible to the audience.⁸³

Conclusions

All in all, there is an unsurprising resourcefulness in the sexual fantasy in evidence in surviving literature. In some cases, we might feel that there is generic obscenity in operation: Old Comedy and Satyric Drama are particularly rich in sexual suggestion, and it is also central to the *Priapeia*, while the nature of ancient ethnography encouraged an interest in and invention of curious sexual arrangements and customs. Beyond that, we are often looking at the individuality of authors; we could argue that the ideal novel tends to the opposite extreme, with

its interest in the heroine's chastity, but the tendencies and tastes of the comic novelists Petronius and Apuleius more than compensate for any sexual austerity in the ideal novel.

Notes

- 1 Hesiod, *Theogony* 168–182.
- 2 Hesiod, *Theogony* 183–200.
- 3 Herodotus 1.108.
- 4 Plato, *Symposium* 189D–192A.
- 5 Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazousai* 643–648.
- 6 *Clouds* 973–976, with Dover ad loc.
- 7 *Frogs* 1240f.
- 8 *Lysistrata* 574ff.
- 9 *Lysistrata* 1074–1081.
- 10 *Lysistrata* 1168–1174.
- 11 *Corpus Priapeum* 16, cf. 41.
- 12 CP 53; CP 65.
- 13 CP 35, cf. CP 27, 44, 69.
- 14 CP 41, cf. 47, where failure to produce poems is to make a girlfriend go elsewhere.
- 15 CP 5, cf. 38.
- 16 AP 16.240, a verse dialogue between Priapus and a vagrant.
- 17 CP 51.27f., CP 64.
- 18 CP 8 cf. Martial 3.68; Telethousa, CP 19.
- 19 CP 12, cf. 32, 57.
- 20 CP 46; Horace *Epodes* 8, 12.
- 21 CP 26; CP 55.
- 22 CP 33; CP 63; CP 77.
- 23 CP 79.
- 24 CP 27; CP 34, cf. also 4, 40.
- 25 CP 40; CP 50.
- 26 CP 37.
- 27 CP 10.4f.: *sed lignum rude vilicus dolavit/et dixit mihi 'tu Priapus esto'*.
- 28 CP 66.
- 29 CP 2.4–10, cf. 49.
- 30 CP 3.
- 31 CP 4; CP 63.
- 32 CP 67.
- 33 CP 15.
- 34 CP 68.21f.
- 35 CP 68.25f.; 33–36.
- 36 CP 9, cf. 20, 36, 39.
- 37 CP 10.3, cf. Columella 10.29f., Martial 6.73.
- 38 CP 11.
- 39 CP 13, cf. 22, the orifices proper to each kind of partner, 74.
- 40 CP 14, cf. 29, one can use coarse language when even the god exposes himself.
- 41 CP 23, cf. 58.
- 42 Cf. also 47.
- 43 CP 25, cf. *Iliad* 1.234ff.
- 44 CP 31.
- 45 CP 56.
- 46 CP 45.

- 47 CP 52.
- 48 CP 62.
- 49 CP 72.
- 50 CP 78.1–4.
- 51 CP 61.
- 52 *Fasti* 1.399–440; *Fasti* 6.319–346.
- 53 6.72; cf. Ps.-Lucian *Epigram* 30, where there is nothing to steal but the watchman himself.
- 54 *Catalepton* 1a.
- 55 Martial 14.70.
- 56 Prudentius *Contra orationem Symmachi* 1.103–115.
- 57 *Satyrica* 133.4–137.2.
- 58 *Od.* 19.467–475; *Satyrica* 105.9.
- 59 *ARV*² 446.
- 60 *House of the Vettii*, VI.15.1 fauces b.
- 61 *ARV* 157, 84; *PARA* 417.
- 62 Boston 08.31c.
- 63 *ARV*² 312.
- 64 *ARV*² 1137; Lucian, *Verae Historiae* 1.22.
- 65 *ARV*² 1565; 551.
- 66 *ARV* 238, 5.
- 67 Moschus 1.18–22.
- 68 Propertius 2.29.
- 69 Propertius 1.16.
- 70 *Verae Historiae* 1.8. Some danger of over-interpretation in ní Meallaigh (2014), 213–216. For example, I can see no hint of rape in the plucking of the vine-fruit; it is, after all, the vine-women themselves who have already offered their services.
- 71 Compare the folkloric motif of the *vagina dentata*, Stith Thompson motif F547.1.1.
- 72 *Alexander Romance* 2.36 in B.
- 73 *Verae Historiae* 2.36.
- 74 *Verae Historiae* 1.16; 35.
- 75 *Verae Historiae* 1.22f.; 2.45.
- 76 *Pseudologista* 27.
- 77 *Lexiphanes* 2–15 passim.
- 78 *Eunuchus* 6, 11.
- 79 Apuleius *Met.* 10.34; 6.31f.
- 80 *Onos* 9.
- 81 *Met.* 2.17.
- 82 *Life of Aesop* 75f.
- 83 *Passio Perpetuae* 10.

Part II

Divergent imaginations



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10 Verse fantasy into prose

Philosophers are inclined to allow the license of fantasy to poets; we might then ask whether the same or some different license can be offered to writers of prose. One example will alert us to some contrasting possibilities. Theocritus' eleventh *Idyll* tells its addressee there is no remedy for love of the normal medicinal kind, but only the arts of song of the Muses¹ (*Ouden pot ton erōta pephukei pharmakon allo, Nikia, out' egchriston, emin dokei, out' epipaston, ē tai Pierides*, 'There's no other cure for love, Nikias, no ointment, no application, but the Muses'). We might well suspect that we have not heard the last word on the subject; we have to wait nonetheless perhaps all of five centuries for a 'correction' from the novelist Longus:² *Erōtos gar ouden pharmakon, ou pinomenon, ouk esthiomenon, ouk en ōidais laloumenon, hoti mē philēma kai peribolē kai sugkataklithēnai gumnois sōmasi* ('There's no medicine for love, no drink, no food, nothing chanted in song, except for kissing and embracing and lying down together with naked bodies').

Longus' version is not only different because it is more practical; it is also distinguished by the fact that it is in a novel in prose. It is not strictly speaking a paraphrase of Theocritus, more a distinctive allusion to a famous opening, but it alerts us to a significant and forgotten industry: the re-presentation of classic verse materials, particularly in Later Antiquity, in prose. It is worth examining some of the ways this process could be made to work and its distinctive contribution to literary fantasy.

We do not have to look further than the same poem for a full-blown paraphrase as opposed to incidental imitation. The contents of Theocritus' Galatea idyll require little reminder: the Cyclops Polyphemus' serenade begins with a eulogy of the nymph's complexion; he has loved her since she first came to pick hyacinths on his hill (11.25ff.). In spite of his single eye, he is wealthy, and a better singer than others of his kind, and he is raising pets for her, including four bear cubs.³ Theocritus' grotesque portrayal of the Cyclops in love is an anthology piece, and rightly, but what possibilities does it offer to the writer of prose paraphrase? Lucian uses the substance of this first section of the lament in the first of his prose *Dialogi Marini*:⁴

Doris: A handsome lover, Galatea, this Sicilian shepherd they say is madly in love with you!

Galatea: Don't joke about him, Doris; whatever he looks like, he's the son of Poseidon.

First of all, Lucian is not bound to take the Cyclops' speech absolutely as it stands; the reduction to prose need not be a literal copy where the medium itself is left to make all the difference. Instead he introduces a major shift in viewpoint as well: how does Galatea feel about all this? And how ought she to feel? It is assumed that within two or three days, the sea-nymph has had a change of heart and is now soft on her unlikely admirer. A fellow nymph, Doris, teases her about her boyfriend; Poseidon's son he may be (a Homeric detail omitted by Theocritus), but he has such a wild hairy appearance and oh—that eye! Galatea defends his appearance; his wild and hairy look is manly, his eye suits his forehead and is just as good as two! As far as she is concerned, the others are just jealous; he singled out Galatea when he caught sight of her as the nymphs were playing on the shore, but Galatea has nothing but her white skin—which he likes because it's the same colour as cheese and milk. But then he's musical, Galatea urges; Doris is able to comment on his serenade and describes the lyre and off-key performance (not in Theocritus), to say nothing of the goatly smell, the bear-cub as hairy as himself (not in Theocritus); as for his dining habits—raw meat and strangers (back to Homer).

Lucian has used a recognisable minimum of Theocritean material, ingeniously recycled; the Cyclops' aspiration to sprout fins (61) or his boast of other lovers (72ff.) might all have furnished comic material. Lucian has tended to select rather from the beginning of the lament; he has also chosen details that might directly interest a fellow Nereid and possible rival, and he has very cleverly timed them.⁵ The result could have been expressed in verse, but it would have been more appropriate to Mime rather than Idyll. Lucian has brought the milk-white Galatea down to earth; she must be desperate to find anything good in the Cyclops, but see it she does. What began as a tongue-in-cheek poetic fantasy in Theocritus now has the flavour of almost catty tittle-tattle; for all the fantasy of the Cyclops and his eye, we have been pitched into something more like the real world.

Why write a piece of this kind in the first place? Having looked at the possibilities in one example we can retreat to a distance and attempt to survey the whole scene. Prose paraphrase is rooted in the emulation of verse by prose, the emulation of poets by orators. The fact of the priority of archaic literature in verse with its didactic 'authority' demanded the emulation of poets by any new wisdom in prose. Sophistic writers, as a matter of course, are set to mirror or even outdo the works of poets—one thinks of Gorgias' encomium on Helen—and a sophistically related literary artist in Plato will produce hymns to Love in prose as a matter of course, though in some cases they are even here attributed to established poets, like the speeches of Agathon and Aristophanes in the *Symposium*. When the methods of rhetoricians and sophists are systematised, so are the reflexes to imitate poetry, including love-poetry; and it may not have been too long before the whole subject was enshrined in literary exercise: witness Menander's *peri Epideiktikōn* on prose Epithalamium.⁶ The bulk of our examples will be drawn from the early Imperial phase of the Second Sophistic, when the practice is clearly well established, frequent and idiosyncratic. If its natural medium is the humble

school *progymnasma* (preliminary exercise), it was able to take in a much wider catchment: prose epigram, epistolography, dialogue and of course, most significantly, the novel itself.

One collection of prose paraphrases can be set aside at the very outset: those of Parthenius' *Erōtika Pathēmata*. Here the author's motive is purely utilitarian: to provide an aide-memoire for his friend the Elegiac poet Cornelius Gallus in the composition of actual poetry. As a result, these paraphrases are for the most part a transitional medium between verse and verse (though in a few cases even here, Parthenius is epitomating prose rather than producing transposition of verse, or in other cases providing large chunks of verse with prose links). And Parthenius may also even attempt inverse paraphrase, as when he offers his own lines on the subject of Byblis' suicide after the death of Caunus.⁷ But none of this is paraphrase in its own right; it is not primarily intended as creative literature.

Moschus' *Europa*

A further Hellenistic classic calls for attention: the amorous journey of Zeus in the *Europa* of Moschus, already noted as mythological fantasy in Chapter 6. We have noted a reworking of the scene in two sophistic prose sources: the opening of Achilles Tatius' novel and the fifteenth of Lucian's *Dialogi Marini*. Both paraphrases must deal with the critical details in Moschus:⁸

But (Europa) sitting on the back of Zeus the bull, held with one hand his great horn, and in the other she collected the purple folds of her robe, so that the unspeakably deep water of the white waves should not wet it as it dragged along. And the deep robe of Europa billowed on her shoulder like the sail of a ship, and rendered her a light cargo.

First Achilles Tatius:⁹

A bull had been painted in the middle of the sea, riding on the waves as billows arose like a mountain where the leg bent as she swam. The maiden sat in the middle of the bull's back, not astride but side-saddle, with her two feet together on the right as she held the bull's horn as a charioteer would hold the reins. And the bull inclined more in that direction, guided by the pull of her hand ... both her hands stretched out, one to the bull's horn, the other towards his tail; with both hands she held a veil in a circle above her head; it flew down onto her shoulders, as the billow of the robe stretched; it was as if the artist had painted a breeze. And the girl on the bull like a ship in course, using her veil as the sail ...

Achilles has used the purple colour and the billowing motif; he has added the idea of reins, and filled in a good deal of anatomy; indeed, he is a very considerable

voyeur, and the details he adds are predictably translucent. Lucian is distinctly more restrained:¹⁰

(Europa) was absolutely terror-struck by the event, and held on with her left hand to the bull's horn, so as not to fall off, while with the other hand she held her robe as it billowed in the wind.

The other element is the procession itself which accompanies the couple:¹¹

And on his arrival the sea became tranquil,
The creatures of the sea gambolled round about the feet of Zeus,
And over the swell joyful dolphins leapt up from below,
Nereids surfaced from below the waves,
And all of them sat on the beasts' backs and marched in line;
And above the sea the deep-roaring Earthshaker
Made a way for his brother with a briny path;
And around him the Tritons assembled, the band-players of the deep sea,
Sounding the wedding-hymn on their spiralling conches.

This time the sophistic prose-artist Achilles has reversed the amount of detail in their treatments:¹²

Around the bull dolphins would dance while Cupids played; you would say their very movements were depicted; Eros was dragging the bull, Eros, a tiny child, with his wings outstretched ...

Lucian, by contrast, tends to develop the details point by point,¹³ *D.Mar.* 15.3:

For the sea at once became waveless; she draped herself in calm and smoothed herself over; all of us kept quiet and were mere onlookers only as we followed along; while the Erotes flew alongside, a little above the sea, sometimes touching the waves with the tips of their feet; they carried torches and sang the wedding hymn, while Nereids came up to the surface, riding on dolphins and applauding, for the most part half-naked, while the tribe of tritons and any other sea-creatures that are not frightening danced round the girl. Now Poseidon rode his chariot, with Amphitrite at his side: he was delighted to clear a path for his brother's swim. And on top of it all, two tritons carried Aphrodite on a conch, scattering flowers of all kinds over the bride.

With minor readjustments, Lucian has reproduced the cast-list of the procession, but again with 'amorous' additions: the Erotes at the beginning, Aphrodite at the end and Amphitrite along with Poseidon for good measure. The emphasis is on how the spectacle would have appeared to the gossiping Winds as witnesses. It may be that either Lucian or Achilles Tatius described an actual painting based on Moschus, or indeed that Moschus did a poetic *ecphrasis* of a painting to whose

tradition the prose-writers themselves had access. But imperial sophists do tend to exploit the point where painting and literature converge and coincide.

The handling of erotic themes

One obvious challenge is to reproduce or alter in prose the effect of amatory verse. A number of Lucian's short prose dialogues seem to have a more or less close relationship with Anthology Epigrams. One might be tempted to guess that Philodemus' dialogue epigram on the conversation between a courtesan and a client would have provided the basis for Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans*¹⁴ (AP 5.46. 1f.):

'Greetings' 'And greetings to you' 'What am I to call you?' 'What am I to call you?' 'Not yet: you're in too great a hurry; you mustn't ask either ...'

Here we might feel that the contrast between prose and verse is minimised: the Epigram is made the unlikely vehicle for short staccato realistic conversation close to the language of prose, while Lucian's examples, though all of them longer than normal epigram length, are seldom excessively so.

To turn to more specific themes: the lover's complaint against Eros¹⁵ is set out by Meleager:

By Cypris, Love, I'll light a fire and burn all your things—your Scythian bow and the quiver that holds your arrows. Why do you laugh that silly laugh of yours when you turn up your snub nose? Soon you'll laugh when you're red—I will chop off your swift-flying wings that lead on desire, and I will clamp bronze chains about your feet ...

This is paraphrased in *D. Deor.* 19:

So that I've warned him often if he doesn't stop (making me, Aphrodite, fall in love) I'll break his bow and quiver and remove his wings; before now I've taken my sandal to his bottom.

Again the addition of corporal punishment on the cherub's behind serves to bring the scene down to earth. There are other similar treatments: Zeus has to turn to gold to avoid terrifying Danae;¹⁶ a duenna gives advice;¹⁷ Bed and Lamp spy on lovers;¹⁸ even Aphrodite is the victim of Eros;¹⁹ or Hermes himself is in love.²⁰

A second obvious theme concerns *kallipugia* ('elegant bottoms'). We have a celebrated allusion to the judgement of Paris from the late epigrammatist Rufinus:²¹

I myself judged three backsides; for the ladies chose me and displayed the
naked lightning-flash of their limbs;
The first bore the stamp of laughing dimples,
As the white softness flowered from her buttocks;

As for the second, the snowy flesh gave a blush from her parted legs,
 Blushing more than the reddened rose;
 The third had the calm of the sea furrowed by the opulent skin,
 As it jiggled of its own accord.
 If the judge of the goddesses had seen these,
 He would not have wanted to see once more the first trio.

Let us look at two prose versions of the theme. In Lucian's *Dearum Iudicium*,²² the author is able to heighten the suggestive effect by simply implying the details where Rufinus launches into his extravagant similes:

- (Paris): This I want to know first, whether it will be enough to look at them as they are, or is it necessary for them to strip for a detailed examination?
 (Hermes): This would be for you as judge: give any instructions you like.
 (Paris): As I like? I want to see them naked.
 (Hermes): Strip off, ladies; and you examine them; my back is turned.
 (Paris): ... Zeus, god of wonders! What a sight, what beauty, what delight!

While in Alciphron *Ep.* 4.14.4f. we have a naked beauty contest between two courtesans, Myrrhina and Thryallis:

And first Myrrhina undid her girdle (she was wearing a silken shift); and through it you could see her quivering like whey as she shook her loins, taking a peek behind at the movements of her buttocks; and gently, as if in the act, she would give a little sigh, so that by Aphrodite I was amazed (Thryallis, not to be outdone, removes her shift as well and challenges Myrrhina) 'For I'm not going to contest the issue through a curtain, nor am I going to be coy, but as if I were in a wrestling match ...'

Athenaeus recounts similar competitions from the iambographers Cercidas and Archelaus (554C-E). The letters of Philostratus come perhaps still closer to reproducing the techniques of amatory epigram in prose:²³

Lysias thinks one should oblige the man not in love; Plato thinks one ought to gratify the lover; but you think both the lover and the non-lover; no philosopher has this opinion, but I think it appeals to (the courtesan) Lais ...

But here again there is a distinctive element about the interest and typical content of sophistic prose that is able to take over and transform the erotic situation. A characteristic topos of the amatory repertoire is the idea that the harsh and spurning lover is the monstrous offspring of some undesirable mythological creature; one thinks in particular of Scylla's lament in Ovid *Metamorphoses* 8. 122ff.:

*Nec Iove tu natus, nec mater imagine tauri
 Ducta tua est: generis falsa est ea fabula! Verus*

*Et ferus et captus nullius amore iuvencae
Qui te progenuit Taurus fuit.*

Nor are you, Minos, the offspring of Zeus,
Nor was your mother attracted by the image of a bull,
That tale is a false one; it was a real bull,
And a savage one, seduced by the love of no heifer
That was your father.

With this we can compare Philostratus *Ep.* 47, where the spurned lover compares her tormentor to a husband-slaying Danaid:

I think I have found you out, if I am not a bad and useless expert in physiognomy. Danaus was your father, and that was the hand and the murderous resolve; and yet one of those husband-slaying maidens spared the life of her youthful love. I will not beg you; I do not shed any tears; fulfil the drama so that you touch me, even if with a sword.

There is little to choose between the extremes of verse rhetoric and prose.

Not all erotic or amorous subject-matter needs to be Hellenistic or elegiac. What might be described as an almost Hellenistic scenario in Homer, the tale of Ares and Aphrodite in *Odyssey* 8, seems to call for prose treatment, and here perhaps all that is called for at all is the resolution into prose and a few discreet alterations of detail.

The singer Demodocus reports the whole episode in the third person as a verse novella, though with a little reported dialogue, notably between Hermes and Apollo:²⁴

‘Hermes, son of Zeus, messenger, bestower of good things,
Would you be willing to sleep in bed beside golden Aphrodite, pressed by
stout bonds?’
There answered him then the guide and slayer of Argus,
‘Would that it might happen, royal far-darting Apollo, might there be three
times as many endless fastenings ...’

At *D. Deorum* 21.2, Lucian seizes on the kernel of dialogue here, and unsurprisingly presents it as the centrepiece, as both good paradox and good fun:

Apollo: Would you allow yourself to be tied up like that?
Hermes: Wouldn't you, Apollo, just come and take a look?

The rest of the material is skilfully telescoped to fit this framework. The situation can be reduced and explained in a matter of lines:

Hephaestus had known this, I think, for a while and was stalking them; and putting invisible chains round the bed he set off for his furnace. Then Ares

slipped in unnoticed, so he thought, but the sun saw him and informed Hephaestus ...

Lucian's narrative viewpoint is restricted to little more than the bare outlines that Homer would have been able to gather as a spectator; some details have had to go, including the few details of the magic bed and Ares' gibe against Hephaestus' conversations with the (uncouth) Sintians. At this point, he expands the scene with observations from Hermes' point of view: the couple are almost in the act; Aphrodite was embarrassed at not being able to hide her state of nudity; Ares tried a show of breaking the cords ...

Erotic ecphrasis

Another prose vehicle of amatory themes is the short *ecphrasis*, a natural exercise in the *progymnasmata*. Two Philostrati produced versions, and, as often in a sophists' world, literature and art can be closely allied. Philostratus the Younger addresses himself directly to Medea's love for Jason in Colchis and seems clearly to envisage a situation relating to Apollonius Rhodius. Several points of the literary text seem to be implied: Eros' task of making the couple fall in love, Medea's conflict of feelings and the meeting between Jason and Medea (in the meadow). Here, the restrictions of *ecphrasis* naturally come into play; the sophist is not simply allowed to paraphrase the poet; he must restrict himself not to what the artist did depict if there was one, but to what an artist could have depicted. The resulting comparison is in this case disappointing. Medea's conflicting feelings, set off as they are in Apollonius in the great simile of the moon shimmering in the pail, have gone. Not an inevitable loss, since Philostratus could easily have said 'the artist has cunningly depicted her feeling as if she were light reflected in a pail', or the like. Instead, the whole business is compressed to the point of banality:

(7.2) The girl is in love with the stranger, and unaccustomed thoughts creep over her; she does not know what has happened to her, and she is distraught and her mind is wandering.

Apollonius also supplies the succeeding tableau in Philostratus. Eros and Ganymede (8) play a game in which Eros cheats and is bribed by Aphrodite with the gift of a magic ball to make Medea fall in love with Jason. Philostratus opens by describing the state of the game and identifying the three goddesses with a flourish of literary quotations; he resists the very obvious temptation to read into their expression the subtle sarcasm expressed by Aphrodite in the text of Apollonius. The situation of the Argonauts is then used to explain the scene, and a description of the Phasis does seem to belong to an unusual picture rather than to any indication in the text of Apollonius himself. Then there is the matter of the bribe:²⁵

And I would give you the very lovely toy of Zeus. His nurse Adrasteia made it for him in the cave on Mount Ida while he was still only an infant. It is a

ball that runs smoothly; you would not get a better one from the hands of Hephaestus; it has circlets of gold, and round each twofold stitch-bands wind; the stitching is hidden, and dark blue ribbon runs right round it; but if you throw it up with your hand, it sends a fiery trail like a shooting star.

In Philostratus, this comes out thus:

As payment for his mischief his mother shows him a ball which she tells him was once a toy of Zeus. Do you see the craft in the painting? The ball is gold; the stitch-work you might imagine rather than see, and the spirals of dark blue wreath round it; and thrown up I think the brightness will seem like the sparkling of stars (8.4f.).

The maker and the place have gone; the author breaks the illusion to capture the child's attention, but the sequence of details is maintained, right down to the sparkle-trail of Zeus' ball. The idea of the hidden stitching is more elaborated in Philostratus, whose picture is on the whole clearer (Apollonius is both compressed and obscure).

Alciphron, Aelian and New Comedy

Much of the common ground between amatory themes in poetry and prose is lost or not easily traceable to the limited survival of New Comedy. It is clear enough nonetheless when erotic epistolographers such as Alciphron are in operation that it is one of their chief arsenals, even if we are less inclined than scholars once were to recompose large sections of Alciphron into iambs from which they had supposedly just been resolved. In terms of content alone, we might be tempted to suspect a letter like the following, Alciphron *Ep.* 3.31:

When I saw Nebris with her basket, a young girl with beautiful arms and fingers and eyes that gleam; she has a good height and lovely skin, with gleaming cheeks; I was so on fire with love that I forgot myself and ran up wanting to kiss her on the mouth. But then I came to my senses: I kept close and wanted to kiss the ground she walked on. Alas for my arrogance; I no longer have an appetite for lupines or beans or gruel, but I have so outgrown myself that I love what is unattainable. All of you come together here and stone me to death before I am torn apart by my longings; and let the heap of stones serve me as a lover's tomb.

It is difficult to know what has happened in such a case. We seem to have all the hallmarks of an eccentric literary exercise. What begins as lyrical love-sentiment gives way to a surprise, when we find it is the parasite who is in love, not the young master's go-between or supporter, though again his melodramatic final flourish seems not inconsistent with Comedy once more; one thinks of the parasite Gnathon in *Daphnis and Chloe*.

Conclusions

What observations, then, can we make about 'prose paraphrase' as a general technique? The examples we have looked at show a broad spectrum of purposes, from the merely transcribing to the subtlest parody or imitation or exercise, and ultimately to the serious creation of new literature. If prose paraphrase is only one aspect of genre transposition and recreation, it is nonetheless a major one, capable of relating to any poetic genre and forming a major link between poetry and rhetoric. Perhaps most important of all, it is a process through which any given author has the opportunity to strike the elusive balance between imitation and individuality. In general, the prose examples are more down to earth, but we also have the impression that our authors have chosen simply to change one fantasy for another.

It is tempting to end with an exhibit which we could not honestly call love-poetry, but which is certainly a distinctive part of the erotic repertoire. We are familiar not only with Catullus 63 but also with the received doctrine that it is unique in ancient literature; one indeed expects to find few specimens of self-emasculators who experience a change of heart, though we are unsurprised when they review the Greek companionships and institutions that they miss:²⁶

Shall I be parted from my homeland, my possessions, my friends, my
parents?
Shall I be parted from the forum, the wrestling-ground, the running track
and the gymnasia?
Poor wretch that I am! Time and again I must complain, my soul.
For I am a woman, who was once a young man, a youth, a boy;
I was the flower of the gymnasium, I was the pride of the anointed ones ...

After Catullus' Galliambics, here is Pollux of Naucratis' prose version of the emasculated Greek boy looking back on the world he has lost:²⁷

I serve as the king's slave, gifted to him by a satrap, but I do not mount a Median horse or take a Persian bow, nor do I come out to battle or the hunt as a man, but I sit in the women's quarters and serve the king's harim, and the king is not enraged, for I am a eunuch. I find favour with them, telling of the Greek sea and I tell fine tales of the Greeks, how they celebrate the festivals in Elis, how they dispense oracles at Delphi, and what is the Altar of Mercy at Athens. But you too, father, write to me and tell me when the Hyacinthia are celebrated at Sparta, and the Isthmian Games at Corinth and the Pythia at Delphi, and whether the Athenians are winning naval battles. Farewell and send my greetings to my brother, if he is not yet sold.

This sophist's version is more openly didactic than Catullus' presentation; but the final sentence is not lacking in a pathos of its own.

Notes

- 1 Theocritus 11.1ff.
- 2 Longus 2.7.7.
- 3 Theocritus 11.34–41.
- 4 *D. Marini* 1.1.
- 5 *D. Marini* 1.1.2.
- 6 Menander II.6 (pp. 134–147 Russell-Wilson).
- 7 *Erōtica Pathēmata* 11.4.
- 8 Moschus 2.125ff.
- 9 Achilles 1.1.9–12.
- 10 *D. Marini* 15.2.
- 11 Moschus 2.115–124.
- 12 Achilles 1.1.13.
- 13 *D. Marini* 15.3.
- 14 *AP* 5.46. Other dialogues with courtesans: Philodemus *AP* 5.46; *AP* 5.120 (lover obstinate in bed) cf. *D. Meretr.* 11; Meleager 5.184 (lovers' quarrel in bed); Philodemus *AP* 5.123 (Selene and Endymion /*D. Deor.* 19).
- 15 *AP* 5.179, cf. *AP* 12.82, 86/*D. Deor.* 12; *AP* 12.14/*D. Deor.* 14.
- 16 *AP* 5.33/*D. Deor.* 6.
- 17 *AP* 5.41/*D. Meretr.* 3.
- 18 *AP* 5.7/*Kataplous* 27.
- 19 *AP* 12.86/*D. Deor.* 20.
- 20 *AP* 12.143/*D. Deor.* 15.
- 21 *AP* 5.35, cf. 36.
- 22 *D. Deorum* 20.9–11.
- 23 Philostratus *Ep.* 44.
- 24 *Odyssey* 8.335ff.
- 25 *Apollonius Rhodius* 3.132–141.
- 26 Catullus 63.59–64.
- 27 Philostratus *VS* 593.

11 Inventing the past in Homer and Philostratus

One of the most obvious ways in which creative imagination is called for is in the supplying of a sense of the past. And the less recent the past, the more fantastic its imagining can be allowed to be. We are used to thinking of Homer as a poet of action, and action in the present. The Trojan War is still in progress in the *Iliad*, and Odysseus still has to find his way home and take revenge on the suitors in the *Odyssey*. All seems to be concerned with the here and now, and with what is fated to happen only a little way into the future. But it is important to bear in mind another dimension: the sense of a heroic past, especially of awareness of heroes before those of the Trojan War itself. As the *Iliad* in particular unfolds, we have a sense that behind the pressures of the present there is a sense of what has happened long ago, and even in previous generations and the way it still affects the present; and heroic actions, including those of Achilles, are still bound in some measure by what has gone before. Here we are able to look at what is often still fantasy, but of a different order to what we have examined so far.

We have a clear enough indication of this dimension as early as book I of the *Iliad*. When Nestor tries to intervene in the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon, he looks back two generations and tells the Achaean Assembly:¹

In my day, I associated with better men than you,
And never once did they slight me;
I never saw men like them, nor shall I see such.
Such as Pirithous and Dryas, marshaller of the hosts,
And Caineus and Exadius and godlike Polyphemus,
Or Theseus the son of Aigeus, equal to the immortals.
These were the mightiest of men nourished upon the earth,
They were the mightiest, and they fought the mightiest,
The Beast men who live in the mountains, and dreadfully did they
destroy them;
And I kept company with them, arriving from Pylos,
From a distant land far away, for they summoned me;
And I fought in single combat against such as these.

Now Nestor has a special point to press home here:

No mortals of today upon the earth would be a match for them;
And they listened to my advice and obeyed my words ...

(and if they did, he implies, why shouldn't you?) Now we can read this in more than one way. Nestor is an old campaigner, a veteran of the previous generation but one; we expect him to be looking back and living in the past. It is an essential part of his character, but it also allows Homer to give a flashback and to set the War for the first time against the context of a still more glorious past.

Nestor's case is a good starting-point. He lived three generations of men, and the span he covers is a memory as far back as the grandfathers of normal warriors at Troy. And that too is the normal span of human memory itself. It is one of the few things that we still have in common with Agamemnon and Menelaus—that we cannot normally remember much before our grandfather's generation. We now have other things to help us extend our memory: we have a concept of history and a science of historiography. But neither Homer nor the warriors he re-creates could have had any such thing. And very interestingly for us, this three-generations-ago past is where the fantasy is; battles with centaurs are more likely to happen then than in the present.

Without writing there is only memory, which may be very reliable if left on its own, but cannot easily be checked. We see Homer as an Archaic Greek oral poet, looking back across the Dark Ages and capturing the gilded memory of the last of the Mycenaean World before them. But within that Mycenaean World, how do his characters think of their past?

Other heroes besides Nestor also think in such terms. In Book 6 of the *Iliad*, in a celebrated encounter, Glaucus son of Hippolochus, fighting on the Trojan side, boasts of his family to Diomedes. The whole speech is elaborately constructed, first the famous simile comparing the generation of men to leaves,² then:

And if you wish to learn this, so that you may know my family's descent,
and many men know it,
There is a city Ephyra in the fold of horse-nourishing Argos;
There Sisypheus lived, the son of Aeolus, and the craftiest of men, and he
had a son Glaucus, and Glaucus fathered noble Bellerophon ...

Then follows a long story, a semi-mythical tale, about the deeds of Bellerophon, how he was framed by the wife of Proetus who had tried to seduce him, how he killed the chimaera³ and subdued the Amazons and Solymi but eventually incurred the displeasure of the gods. His family in turn had mixed fortunes, but his son Hippolochus survived, and had sent forth Glaucus himself. And it was he, Hippolochus son of Bellerophon, who gave Glaucus the famous charge:⁴

Always to be the bravest, and superior to others,
Not a reproach to my fathers, who were

The best in Ephyra and in broad Lycia;
That is the lineage and the blood to which I lay claim.

Now this episode is among the most celebrated and unusual episodes of the *Iliad*. It is interesting for its conventions of heroic behaviour and for its valuable details of the myth of Bellerophon. But it is also interesting for its perspective on the past. Glaucus takes a matter of some 60 lines to cover the history of no fewer than six generations, from Aeolus to his own. It does not take much imagination to see how boring a task that could have been, but what Homer does is to condense the first three generations of Glaucus' ancestry, tell an extended and romantic yarn about his grandfather Bellerophon, and then condense the family history quickly again. The depth of perspective created by six generations is really focused on only one. This tells us much about Homer's techniques of selection, for which he was praised even in Antiquity itself. In his *Ars Poetica*, Horace is able to praise the poet for not reciting the story of the Trojan War by starting from the egg that Helen of Troy had come from,⁵ and such a skill is evident here. There is also another technique of illusion. Although Glaucus is proud of his family, its distinctions were in fact questionable: Bellerophon came to a bad end for his arrogance after early virtue and success, and Sisyphus was so cunning that he became an enemy of the gods and ended in Tartarus. And once again the fantastic opponent, the Chimaera, is encountered generations back, not in the present.⁶

Nor is that the end of the matter. In the encounter between Glaucus and Diomedes, Homer still has to deal with Diomedes' own genealogy. The latter in turn is thinking of the past: his grandfather Oineus had entertained Bellerophon in his house for 20 days, and they had exchanged gifts: a warrior's belt and a gold cup, which Diomedes had left behind. He did not remember his father Tydeus, who had left to fight in the War at Thebes, but now he hails Glaucus in turn as a friend and they exchange gifts.⁷ Another masterpiece of selectivity: Homer does not make the mistake of repeating another six generations of Diomedes' family, as he had for Glaucus, even if he knew them. Instead he cuts in at the grandfather stage. And Diomedes does not even remember Oineus directly; what he remembers is the gold cup, the material object, the souvenir from Bellerophon's past, one of Jasper Griffin's 'significant objects'.⁸ He did not even remember his father very much. But that is still an opportunity to mention another War, the most significant one before Troy itself, the War around Thebes which Tydeus had left to fight in, and so we have two generations back, not catalogued but skilfully implied in two different ways.

Imagining heroic childhood

So much, then, for the way Homer can look back to past generations, but there is another kind of past: the past of the individual, of the heroic self, in a context of childhood. This too is evocative, but in a totally different way. To see Achilles or Patroclus in a different environment in their childhood, or even at any time before the war, is to be given a private and privileged glimpse, and of this kind of

material Homer is much more sparing. Yet it is at important emotional climaxes in the action that it tends to occur. In the case of Achilles, his old tutor Phoenix looks back in book 9 when he is trying to persuade Achilles to come back to the fray and save the Greeks:⁹

And you I made such as you are, godlike Achilles,
I loved you from my heart, since you were unwilling to go with any other men,
Either to the feast, or dine in your own halls
Until I had set you on my knees and cut the meat into little pieces and held
the wine,
And often you stained my tunic on my breast,
Gurgling it up in your naughty childhood.

This is the nearest Homer gets to nappy-changing, but Phoenix' point is carefully planted. It is a reminder that even Achilles was a baby once, and even the mighty war machine who holds the Greeks to ransom over a personal insult was once no more than a dependent child. And at the beginning of book 23, we find the ghost of Patroclus looking back to the first days of his own companionship with Achilles:¹⁰

Do not lay my bones apart from yours, Achilles,
But together, as we were brought up together in your household since
Menoetius brought me as a little child from Opous into your house
Because of a baleful manslaughter the day I killed the son of Amphidamas,
when I was a mere infant without intent, angry over a game of
knuckle-bones;
Where Peleus the noble welcomed me in his house, and nurtured me with
care, and named me your henchman:
So may a golden two-handed vessel that your lady mother gave you contain
our bones together.

Here we have new light on Patroclus as a dependent of Achilles' family, one of many displaced by blood-crimes in the texture of Epic and requiring patronage and protection. Once more we have another side to the hero: he did not know his own strength and committed manslaughter over a game—an anticipation of his later folly in going out in Achilles' armour. Once again, Patroclus too is linked to his friend by a significant object, an urn with a history of its own, the gift of the goddess Thetis.¹¹

Other perspectives on the past

Apart from these carefully crafted flashbacks to a more glorious age or to a hero's childhood, we have a large number of other ways of establishing a perspective on the past. In one instance at least, Homer combines the twin perspective of distinguished genealogy and poignant personal reminiscence: in the case of Lycaon

in *Iliad* 21, who was captured by Achilles and ransomed in Lemnos, only to be recaptured a matter of 10 days later. Lycaon reminds Achilles:¹²

It was beside you that I first tasted the corn of Demeter,
On the day when you took me prisoner in the well-built garden,
And you took me from my father and friends to the sacred land of Lemnos,
And I earned you a hecatomb.

A poignant reminder: this means that twice Lycaon has been in the wrong place at the wrong time, and he too moves on to his own family tree:¹³

My mother Laothoe bore me to live a short life; she was the daughter of
aged Altes,
Who ruled the war-loving Leleges; he held steep Pedasus on the river
Satnioeis.
Priam took his daughter to wife, among many others. She gave birth to
two of us, and you will have slaughtered both. The other was godlike
Polydorus, since you hit him with a sharp spear, in the foremost ranks of
foot-soldiers.

A distinguished genealogy, but again a poignant one; for all his ancestry, Laothoe was not Hecuba, and the other brother of this match is already dead.

The catalogue of ships has a much more staccato way than most of the *Iliad* for making people famous for 15 lines:¹⁴

Those who pastured Pherae, on the shore of lake Boibeis,
Boibe and Glaphurae and stout Iolcus,
Eleven ships under the dear son of Admetus,
Eumelus whom Alcestis bore, resplendent among women,
The most beautiful among the daughters of Pelias.

Readers of Euripides' *Alcestis* will know of this son of Admetus in a very different context. In the tragedy we find Alcestis, about to die on behalf of her husband, praying to Hestia for a good marriage for the boy, as she herself shows exceptional qualities of self-sacrifice. But Homer sees things in a different perspective: all that matters for the moment is the genealogy and a little brush-stroke of detail. Strangely, he missed the opportunity here to allude to the Argonautic expedition which set out from Iolcus at the behest of Pelias the father of Alcestis.

How is the *Iliad* plot itself treated in flashback in Epic? Achilles' own men figure in the catalogue of ships, not perhaps quite the way we might have expected:¹⁵

Now those who inhabited Pelasgian Argos
Who dwelt at Halos and Alope and Trachis,
Who held Phthia and Hellas with its fair women,
And are known as Myrmidons, Hellenes and Achaeans,

Fifty ships led by Achilles, but they had no mind for the dread sound of war,
For there was no-one to range them in ranks,
For divine swift-footed Achilles lay among the ships,
Angry over the fair-tressed girl Briseis,
Whom he had chosen after great effort from Lyrnessus,
When he sacked it, and the walls of Thebe,
When he threw down Myndes and Epistrophus the raging spearmen,
Sons of Eunoeus the king, son of Selepios,
He lay in grief for her, but soon destined to rise up again.

There are two details here which we did not have when Achilles was complaining to Agamemnon about all his hard work in book I: the deaths of Epistrophos and Myndes the furious spearmen do not figure there. But the catalogue has a style of its own, which resets even more familiar material in a much more common-place way. It is almost as if the *Iliad* itself is collapsed into a footnote; here even Achilles himself is famous for only 14 lines.

So much, then, for flashback in the *Iliad*. In the *Odyssey*, flashback technique is even more important, but it serves a different role. Here we are looking back not to still more glorious wars, or from the pure hell of war to happier times; we have instead the very specialised ethos of 'the war's over and the world has changed'. Hence the flashbacks in the *Odyssey* have a different slant. In book 4, in Menelaus' palace at Sparta, Helen remembers key moments in Odysseus' secret missions to Troy, once when he was a spy and once when he was one of the warriors actually inside the Trojan horse. Menelaus recalls in particular how Helen tested the horse, and how Odysseus restrained his men in its belly from answering her back.¹⁶ This emphasises Odysseus' tact and cunning, but it is also a very unobtrusive way of mentioning the Trojan horse without being drawn into a blow-by-blow account of the whole episode.

It is also in the *Odyssey* that we find the widest generation gap, where Odysseus' son Telemachus, now just grown to manhood, encounters Nestor, who is back safe from Troy and an even grander old man than before. Nestor takes a very different look back at the past from the one we saw in *Iliad* I:¹⁷

There lies Ajax the warlike, there Achilles,
There lies Patroclus, with his godlike counsel,
There my own dear son, mighty and noble,
Antilochus, swift runner and fighter,
And we have endured many other sufferings:
Who among mortal men would recount them all?
Not if you took five years or six, would you recount the ills the divine
Achaeans suffered there.
Before you would weary and go back to your homeland.

Now the Trojan War is no longer the inferior war of the present; it has found its own proper place in the past, even in Nestor's eyes.

We notice too a significant shift of focus in the lying tales of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*. Here again there is a backward glance to Odysseus' supposed adventures, but there is no sentimental casting back to the golden days of peace before the Trojan War. Odysseus' fictitious but plausible adventures tend to fit in with the chaos and mayhem of after the war, when it would not always have been easy to tell between returning troops, opportunist merchants and piratical raiders. Odysseus boasts, it is true, of having been nine times leader of men, but he is more interested in mishap in Egypt after the Trojan expedition,¹⁸ or in general in geography rather than history. And the kind of heroic feats looked back on in the Trojan War are themselves different. Odysseus describes to Eumaeus how he Odysseus was with Odysseus (!) when Odysseus himself got him an extra cloak by trickery, through sending a fast messenger to Agamemnon so that he left his cloak behind, a cunning ruse and a hint that he wants more bedclothes now—but not one of the glories of war.¹⁹

Here once more we can work out that the limits of memory have shifted from the perspectives of the *Iliad*. By now the Trojan War itself is the basic point of reference from which family histories are going to start. It is only perhaps at the very end of the *Odyssey*, in the additional book 24, that we have a harking back to an ideal landscape before the war; we have Odysseus providing signs for his ageing father Laertes in order to prove that he really is his son. He shows his father his famous scar, then goes on:²⁰

For you and my noble mother sent me to Autolycus, my mother's dear father,
So that I might choose gifts, which he had promised and undertaken when
he visited us. Come now, let me describe the trees in the well-planted orchard
that you once gave me, and as a child I asked you as I followed you through
the orchard. We went through them all, and you told me their names and told
me each one. You gave me thirteen pear-trees and ten apple-trees, and forty
fig-trees. And you said you would give me fifty vines, and each one bore
regular vintage; and there were clusters at every point, when the seasons of
Zeus came down on them and weighed them down.

This is a return to Odysseus' childhood, a much more satisfying reminiscence than that of Achilles making a mess of Phoenix' tunic with his wine. Odysseus has just played a trick on Laertes with a completely unnecessary lying tale. Now he makes up for his prank with the evocation of an orchard, a very rare image in the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*—one thinks of one in the magic island of the Phaeacians. Although there is still business to settle with the kinsmen of the murdered suitors, we can now know that the war is really over: the last hero is home and it will soon be as if the Trojan War had never happened.

By nature, the evocation of the heroic past is a serious business, and in antiquity itself, Homer quickly attained classic status, and so could become the target for affectionate parody. At some time in post-classical Greek literature, we have the piece titled the *Batrachomuiomachia*, *The Battle of the Frogs and the Mice*, and in the space of some 300 lines, we have a one-day war between the kingdoms

of these tiny creatures, after a frog accidentally drowned a mouse he was carrying across a stream. Here we find that the mice and the frogs likewise have their own heroic past:²¹

Why do you ask my lineage? It is well-known among all men and gods and birds in heaven.

My name is Crumb-seizer, I am the son of Bread-nibbler my mighty father;
my mother's name was Quern-Licker, daughter of King Ham-Gnawer.
She bore me in the mouse-hole, and nourished me with eatables, figs and nuts and all manner of delicacies.

A more subtle and scholarly dig at Homer's Trojan War comes from Ovid, who can be wry and facetious about just about anything. In book 8 of the *Metamorphoses*, he describes the Calydonian Hunt in which Nestor had taken part as a young man, still in his prime. But things do not quite go according to plan: the boar runs amok, and we are told that²²

*Forsitan et Pylius citra Troiana perisset
tempora, sed sumpto posita conamine ab hasta
arboris insiluit, quae stabat proxima ramis
despexitque, loco tutus, quem fugerat hostem.*

Perhaps even Nestor of Pylos would have perished before the time of Troy,
But he took his spear as a vaulting pole,
And leapt among the branches of a nearby tree,
And from there he looked down, from a safe distance,
On the enemy he had fled from.

This is the sort of exploit that Homer's Nestor is not going to admit to; when the boar is on the loose he has to play safe and perform the most undignified of actions to save himself. He is one of life's survivors and quite an athlete, obviously, but this is a past unworthy of Homer, and Ovid knows it.

What, then, can we learn about the warrior looking back in Homer? Flashback is an essential technique to give a time frame to a narrative when the audience has no other way of appreciating time and the passing of generations. 'Homer' is able to use the technique very skilfully and with great precision to match the circumstances of individual episodes. A great-grandfather here or a childhood memory there has sharply focused symbolic value, evoking family pride or cherished private memory.

Looking back to Homer: the outlook of Philostratus' *Heroicus*

Homer appears to look back to the Trojan War across at least several generations. It is worthwhile to look at the perspectives on Homer close on a millennium later. We find such a perspective in a large-scale prose dialogue by one

of several Philostrati in the early third century CE, the *Heroicus*.²³ This is an exchange between a local vinedresser in the Thracian Chersonnese and a storm-bound Phoenician merchant, whom he gradually converts from initial scepticism to belief in the heroes of the Trojan War. The vinedresser's account is based on information received from the Greek hero Protesilaus, who enjoys a local hero-cult to which the vinedresser eagerly subscribes.

On the basis of Homer, one is tempted to ask what Protesilaus could possibly know about the Trojan War, given that he is traditionally the first hero to step ashore at Troy and the first to be killed! This should indeed qualify as pure fantasy, directly at variance with the received orthodoxies of the past. But we find that already by that point, Protesilaus has distinguished himself in a campaign in Mysia unmentioned by Homer, and is thus at least partly legitimised into the story.²⁴

That is the least of the surprises in store. Where, one must ask, did Homer get his information in the first place? Instead of Homer's having Odysseus go alive to the world of the dead to obtain information from the ghosts, we find here that Homer *himself* had visited that same land to obtain his information on the war from the ghost of Odysseus!²⁵ This has the effect of turning the canonic account on its head. We now find, moreover, that Odysseus had simply invented the traditionally fabulous parts of his account, from the Cyclopes through to the Sirens.²⁶ We find, too, that in exchange for genuine information from the ghost of Odysseus, Homer has agreed to edit out a substantial stretch of tradition surrounding the Greek hero Palamedes, notably unmentioned by the poet. This hero had been the victim of extended jealousy by Odysseus, who had framed him on a charge of venality and had him stoned. Facing punishment for his crime in the world of the dead, Odysseus has secured the complicity of Homer to maintain his heroic reputation in the world of letters, and in effect has been able to airbrush Palamedes out of the war altogether.²⁷

In this alternative framework, then, there is an opportunity to proliferate a whole host of 'adjustments' to the Homeric accounts. One significant casualty is the whole business of Patroclus' disguising in Achilles' armour, the loss of the latter and its replacement by the shield from Hephaestus.²⁸ According to the vinedresser, on the authority of Protesilaus, nothing of the sort ever happened. There seems to be a major motive for 'expurgation' here. And the wrath of Achilles, the lynch-pin of the whole *Iliad*, turns out to have arisen not from the quarrel with Agamemnon over Chryseis but in indignation over the treatment of Palamedes!²⁹ Perhaps most blatant and surprising of all, we now find Helen not back with Menelaus as in the *Odyssey*, but spending a happy immortality with Achilles himself on the island of Leuke in the Black Sea!³⁰ Nor, for that matter, is Helen even the most beautiful of women, being outshone by Hiera, wife of Telephus of Mysia.³¹

The list goes on in a large number of minor details. The Amazons did not appear at Troy, as they do in the *Aethiopis*; the Greeks did not mistake Mysia for Troy, as happens in the *Cypria*.³² Sometimes a small detail seems to point to a personal touch. It is insisted that Philoctetes was not totally abandoned on Lemnos

but was well looked after, and that the volcanic soil healed his wound.³³ One is reminded of the Lemnian connexion of the Philostrati as a family.

Once more, we can ask ourselves how an author will set about inventing his fantastic framework. Part of the technique is to proliferate examples of *ecphrasis* as Protesilaus describes the personal appearance of hero after hero. Menelaus, we are told, wore his hair boyishly long, but the Achaeans tolerated this as in accordance with Spartan tradition.³⁴ Sometimes the interest in athletics of the Philostratean *Gymnasticus* suggests a special interest in the physique of individual warriors:

Protesilaus knows Sthenelus has a good size and is tall, grey-eyed and with a hooked nose, with a good length of hair, slightly red-cheeked, and hot-blooded. He portrays Diomedes as steadfast and having blue-grey eyes, not at all black, and straight-nosed, with hair that was woolly and filthy.³⁵

Protesilaus' account is sympathetic to Nestor, and we are given details not furnished elsewhere. We hear of athletic contests with prizes for boxing and wrestling, or that he captivated Heracles more than Hyllas or Abderos.³⁶ We are offered a touching picture of his introducing his son Antilochus to the war half-way through the siege, and that Protesilaus was reminded by Antilochus of his own age and stature.³⁷ His account of Antilochus' rescue of Nestor differs from the account in *Iliad* 8.94–117,³⁸ where it is Diomedes who rescues the older hero. More pedantically, Philostratus distinguishes the Memnon who killed Antilochus from the Memnon of the *Aethiopsis*.³⁹

Throughout the descriptions, there is a tendency to 'correct' Homer towards a less spectacular picture. The contrast between Agamemnon and Menelaus, for example, differs from the Homeric presentation: Agamemnon is regarded as a worthy warrior and a genuinely regal figure, treated unworthily by Menelaus, who is eventually deprived of his kingdom by Orestes.⁴⁰ This picture is strikingly at odds with the pettiness and petulance of Agamemnon at the outset of the *Iliad*, where he behaves towards Achilles in an unworthy way and sparks off the celebrated wrath in the first place. We can see the point of the alteration; if the wrath was differently motivated (by the unjust treatment of Palamedes), then there is no reason for Agamemnon to antagonise Achilles at the very outset. And if Menelaus is presented as unworthily second-rate, then Helen's liaison at the end with Achilles can be felt to have rather more justification.

An episode involving Idomeneus' bid for leadership of the expedition ends in a *bon mot* which smacks of the rhetorical schools. Ajax suggests 'So brave are we in the martial arts that we could conquer Troy if we fought in earnest; Crete if we did it in fun'.⁴¹ Some details are surprising: the Locrian Ajax possesses a tame snake five cubits long, and Philostratus denies the story of his rape of Cassandra.⁴² Not all of the major alterations of Homeric tradition in the *Heroicus* can be attributed to invention on the part of Philostratus: a number of the changes belong already to Cyclic Epic. The *Cypria* has already a part for Palamedes, and the cult of Achilles at Leuke and Helen's sojourn there were already familiar from Pausanias.⁴³

A similar approach is in evidence in Pausanias' contemporary Lucian. The most unlikely informant, a household cock transmigrated from Pythagoras and Euphorbus, is able to pass on to a cobbler Micyllus details of the Trojan War as he had been able to recollect it from the Trojan side:⁴⁴

Micyllus: So first tell me what happened at Troy. Was it the way Homer tells it?

Cock: Where did he learn about it, Micyllus? While these events were taking place he was a camel in Bactria! But this much I'm telling you, nothing at that time was all that remarkable: Ajax wasn't so huge, nor was Helen as beautiful as people suppose. For I saw that she was white-skinned, and had a long neck, as you would expect from the daughter of a swan; and as for the rest, she was quite old, pretty much ages with Hecuba, as Theseus had snatched her off and kept her in Aphidnae; and he lived in the time of Heracles, and took Troy first time round in our fathers' day—our then fathers, that is. It was Panthous who told me this: he had seen Heracles, he claimed, when he was quite young ...

The two final tales from Protesilaus' account seem calculated to take the reader by surprise. In the first, we find Achilles instructing a merchant to leave behind on the shore a Trojan girl. The merchant hears the cries of the girl as the hero dismembers her with his bare hands.⁴⁵ This atavistic gesture turns out to be the last of Achilles' vengeance for his sufferings at Troy, and the last manifestation of his wrath.

The second anecdote concludes the *Heroicus* on a fantastic note. A squad of Amazons from the furthest reaches of the Black Sea capture some shipwrights, who are able to provide them with a fleet of ships. They embark with their horses and land on Achilles' Island. He is able to induce a panic in the horses so that they turn on their riders and once again bloodily destroy them.⁴⁶ Once more, the heroic power of Achilles is displayed to deadly effect. There is a strong cultural contrast between Philostratus' world and that of archaic Epic; in the Amazon expedition, as frequently elsewhere, we have contrasts between Hellenic ideals and particularly oriental barbarians.

Conclusions

We can see, then, the elements of invention which serve to turn the materials of the Trojan War into two very different sorts of fantasy; in the Homeric poems themselves, this process is already happening. Around a millennium later, the industry of 'correcting' Homer serves to tone down the archaic image.

Notes

1 *Iliad* 1.260–272. The beastmen are the centaurs; Nestor had fought against them on the side of the Lapiths.

2 *Iliad* 6.150–155.

- 3 On the chimaera, Kirk (1990) on 6.179–183.
- 4 *Iliad* 6.208–211.
- 5 Horace, *Ars Poetica* 147.
- 6 *Iliad* 6.179–183.
- 7 *Iliad* 6.224–236.
- 8 Griffin (1980), 30–50.
- 9 *Iliad* 9.485ff. Homer here ignores the alternative tradition that Achilles was reared by the centaur Chiron after his mother Thetis had deserted his father Peleus.
- 10 *Iliad* 23.83ff.
- 11 *Iliad* 23.91f.
- 12 *Iliad* 21.76ff.
- 13 *Iliad* 21.84ff.
- 14 *Iliad* 2.711ff.
- 15 *Iliad* 2.681ff.
- 16 *Odyssey* 4.271–289.
- 17 *Odyssey* 3.109ff. For the end of Antilochus, Pindar *Pythian* 6.28ff.
- 18 *Odyssey* 14.257–286.
- 19 *Odyssey* 14.478–502.
- 20 *Odyssey* 24.333–344.
- 21 *Batrachomyomachia*. 25–31.
- 22 *Met.* 8.365ff.
- 23 Text (de Lannoy) and translation in Maclean and Aitken (2001).
- 24 *Heroicus* 23.4. (The Mysian campaign was however treated in the *Cypria* in the Epic Cycle). For the traditional picture of Protesilaus, cf. Lucian, *D. Mort.* 27.
- 25 *Heroicus* 43.12. For refutation of Homer, Mestre in Aitken and Maclean (2004), 127–141.
- 26 *Heroicus* 34.4.
- 27 *Heroicus* 43.13–16. Achilles' ghost endorses the role of Palamedes at *VA* 4.16. (Homer omits him in order to protect the reputation of Odysseus).
- 28 *Heroicus* 47.3.
- 29 *Heroicus* 48.6–8.
- 30 *Heroicus* 54.6.
- 31 *Heroicus* 23.28. For Lucian's *Gallus* 17, she has too long a neck and is as old as Hecuba.
- 32 *Aethiopsis* in Proclus, *Chrestomathy* 2; *Cypria* in Proclus, *Chrestomathy* 1.
- 33 *Heroicus* 28.4f.
- 34 *Heroicus* 29.5. The detail reinforces the unsympathetic view of Menelaus in the dialogue.
- 35 *Heroicus* 27.13.
- 36 For Nestor's attractiveness, cf. his role in the *Priapeia*: *CP* 76.4.
- 37 Nestor: *Heroicus* 26.9–12.
- 38 *Iliad* 8.94–117 cf. *Heroicus* 26.17f.
- 39 *Heroicus* 26.16.
- 40 *Heroicus* 29.1–4.
- 41 *Heroicus* 30.3.
- 42 *Heroicus* 31.3f.
- 43 *Cypria*, Proclus, *Chrestomathy* 1; Pausanias 3.19.13.
- 44 Lucian, *Gallus* 17.
- 45 *Heroicus* 56.6–10.
- 46 *Heroicus* 57.12–17.



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Part III

Fantastic texts



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12 Fantasy in Old Comedy and Lucian

Some seven centuries separate the two surviving writers from Classical Antiquity who most conspicuously specialise in fantasy, and it is clear—and indeed explicitly stated by the author himself—that Lucian has looked back in a number of ways to his predecessor Aristophanes. In neither case can the term *fantasy* be used as the formal genre label; the one produced Old Comic drama, the other a variety of belles-lettres, notably prose dialogue; but in both cases, fantasy is a characteristic part of the author's equipment. In Aristophanes' case, it was already part of the stock-in-trade of Attic Old Comedy itself; one could not expect to compete effectively at the Athenian dramatic festivals without a resourceful technique of novelty and a sense of the absurd.

The Old Comic repertoire

Fantasy appears to have been built into the comic tradition from the very outset. The use of animal choruses is reflected in titles such as Magnes' *Wasps* and *Frogs* (and possibly *Birds* as well), long before the corresponding titles in Aristophanes; it continues in Crates' *Thēria*, where the chorus of beasts unsurprisingly advocates the vegetarianism of Pythagoras, and in Eupolis' *Aiges* (Goats), also with a beast-chorus.¹ Cratinus already in his *Nemesis* has Pericles dressed as Zeus; the play dealt with the god's relationship with Nemesis and the engendering of Helen. Here already we have the interaction between mythological parody and politics. Thanks to an Oxyrynchus papyrus,² we have a substantial survival from the hypothesis of the *Dionysalexandros*. Here, Dionysus plays the part of Paris, evidently trying to withdraw when the going is not so good—an opportunity for attacking Pericles' belligerent policies and his relationship with Aspasia. We also have the bemoaning of the good old days, a recurrent sort of sentimental Utopianism in the Old Comic tradition, in the *Chirones*, where the chorus harking back consisted of Centaurs; once more there is an attack on the modern corruption under Pericles and Aspasia. There was a *Satyroi*, with a parody of the Cyclops episode of the *Odyssey*; the themes familiar from Aristophanes are already in place. *Archilochoi* had already a contest between great poets of the past; *Panoptae* attacked the omniscience of the sophists; *Thracian women* already lampooned foreign cults such as that of Bendis, looking forward perhaps to Aristophanes'

Thesmophoriazousai. Oxyrynchus fragments of a *Ploutoi* point to spirits of wealth rising up to survey the deserving and undeserving of wealth in Athens. In the *Pytinē* (423), Cratinus envisaged himself as married to Comēdia, who complains of his relationship with the slut Methē (Drunkenness) and his pursuit of Oeniscus (little wine-boy); Pherecrates' *Chiron* brought on Music to complain about her sufferings at the hands of the New Music. Plato *Comicus* brought out a *Phaōn*, dealing with a phallic demon madly pursued by the women. There was also Pherecrates' *Miners (Metalles)*, which depicted life in the Underworld in terms reminiscent of Cloudecuckooland; the *Krapataloi* also included a *katabasis*, while the *Agrioi* had a chorus of Timon-like misanthropes. Three titles, *Coriannō*, *Petalē* and *Thalatta*, take their names from courtesans, while Dionysus making an unlikely soldier was featured in *Taxiarchoi* (Eupolis, 427), presumably attacking the military misadventures of Pericles. Eupolis' *Poleis* contained a chorus of cities to highlight the problems of Athens and her allies. In Eupolis' *Kolakes*, we have a swarm of parasites round the table of Callias. We have considerable survival from Eupolis' *Dēmoi* (412): Solon, Miltiades, Aristides and Pericles are selected to come back from the Underworld to put matters right, and after the parabasis—the choral interlude—they confront and administer deserts to representatives of the present day. At a glance, then, we can see that Aristophanes' originality seems a good deal more limited than the eleven surviving plays on their own would suggest, but that at no point is there a dearth of fantastic themes.

Old Comedy has a reputation for allowing free rein to the imagination. Given the strong element of stereotype in the extant plays, it is possible at least to explore how this free-reined imagination works in practice and how far it seems constrained after all. The foregoing titles from Aristophanes' predecessors underline that his own fantastic inventions are already part of a well-established tradition. Old Comic plays tend to rely on some fundamental impossibility or absurdity. Dicaeopolis in *Acharnians* concludes his own private 30-year peace with Sparta and can set up his own Common Market.³ In *Wasps*, Bdelycleon can satisfy his father's compulsion for jury-service by setting up a private courtroom in his own home.⁴ Once the impossible has been established, much else can be allowed to follow quite logically or common-sensically on the basis of it: Megarians or Boeotians will be allowed to trade in the midst of war, war-mongering generals like Lamachus will be excluded; or in *Wasps*, all manner of little domestic props can be pressed into service to provide the essentials of the Courtroom. In *Peace*, flight to heaven is necessary to reclaim Peace herself from the custody of War,⁵ with similar benefits accruing; in *Birds*, the gods are starved into submission by a new heavenly community of birds reclaiming their ancestral rights, and have to cede Sovereignty to the birds themselves.⁶ Other ideas are equally absurd—at least in ancient eyes—but can be continued within a less cosmic and impossible framework: the women arrange a sex-strike and occupy the Acropolis, acts that are just about in the world of the possible; or women take over the Assembly; or the personified Wealth is to be redistributed. In comparison, *Clouds*, *Wasps* or *Knights* manage to keep within the realms of the possible but merely unthinkable, in respect of at least their principal idea.

There are, however, a number of secondary developments of the imagination: when Dicaeopolis samples his treaties, they are brought in wineskins, as if treaties can be sampled. Indeed they can, since there was a pre-existent pun on treaties and 'pourings' (both *spondai*) since the making of a treaty automatically implied the pouring of a libation to the gods to supply divine sanction. Similarly, Dicaeopolis can seize a child hostage from the Acharnians—which turns out to be a coal-scuttle, as they are charcoal-burners by trade;⁷ similarly, the women in *Thesmophoriazousai* can have a babe in arms which doubles as a wineskin, because for the purposes of Comedy, women are proverbially bibulous.⁸ It is as if instant imaginative associations can be made, to be adopted or discarded at will. A feature is also made, as a natural theatrical reflex, of costume changes: hence the wardrobe scenes in *Acharnians* or *Thesmophoriazousai* for dressing up a character in the manner of Euripides or Agathon respectively, or the comic exchanges of clothes between Dionysus and Xanthias in the *Frogs*, or indeed the idea of disguising Dionysus as Heracles in the first place.⁹ A further such feature is the imaginative language of Comedy; this is where to find Brobdignagian vocabulary deployed often for its sheer exuberance.¹⁰

There is also an aspect of visual invention (as in the literal depiction of the King's Eye in *Acharnians*) or social topsy-turvydom; where the common man is king, the underdog is on top. We can point to imagination grounded in reality when Socrates explains why it is that the clouds take the form of a chorus of women:¹¹

- Socrates: *Have you never looked up and seen a cloud like a centaur
 Or a leopard or a wolf or a bull?*
Strepsiades: *Indeed I have, But why is this?*
Socrates: *They turn into anything they please. And then if they see some long-
 haired wild-looking hairy fellow, like the son of Xenophantes, they
 make fun of his madness by taking on the appearance of Centaurs.*
(They similarly turn to deer to mimic the Shield-loser Cleonymus.)

The intellectual conundrums in *Clouds* exhibit a Heath-Robinson style fantasy, with the literal solution of abstract problems. Socrates measures the jump of a flea by giving it wax slippers and measuring the distance relative to the size of the flea's feet,¹² so parodying Protagoras' concept of 'man the measure' by devising a flea measure instead. Strepsiades will later have similarly eccentric ways of cheating his creditors by capturing the moon that has been magically drawn down, so as to avoid paying debts on the day of the New Moon; or burning the record of debt with a burning-glass.¹³ But the most memorable surprise remains the first appearance of Socrates himself in the basket, treading the air and contemplating the sun from aloft.¹⁴ Close behind comes a literal contest between two *logoi* (which may well have been depicted by fighting cocks in the first edition of the play).¹⁵

In some cases at least, the form fantasy takes will be determined at least by the theatrical mechanics available, and indeed may even have been inspired by them. The fantasy element can also be influenced by the resources for realising

situations on stage. Comic writers could avail themselves of a *mēchanē* or crane which could allow characters to be airborne; and the *ekkyklēma*, an apparently swivelling construction which enabled an upper interior to be revealed. The first of these allowed Socrates to be seen for the first time in *Clouds* up aloft in the basket; the second could display Euripides at work in his study in *Acharnians*. It is only a matter of time before actors break the dramatic illusion and give instructions direct to the scene-shifter to be careful when manoeuvring these precarious devices:¹⁶

Scene-shifter, watch out for me
Already wind's churning round my belly,
And if you don't watch out I'll feed my dung-beetle.

Trygaeus is being carried aloft to heaven on a gigantic dung-beetle; any accidents in operating the crane will cause him to have an accident of his own. In more than one instance, we are left with a sense of inconsequentiality. When Peace is to be rescued from an underground prison where she has been buried by War, it is difficult to reconcile the topography with the celestial flight; and if War has immured Peace just below heaven, how is it possible to call on farmers to set her free?¹⁷ Again, much of the action in Aristophanes is no-sooner-said-than-done. Dicaeopolis commissions the mysterious Amphytheus to enter treaty negotiations with Sparta, while the Athenian assembly entertains the fraudulent Persian and Thracian embassies; by the time they are dealt with, his special agent has now come back with specimens of 5, 10, and 30-year treaties.¹⁸

Aristophanes constrained: Lucian and comic dialogue

It is instructive to compare Aristophanes' techniques of fantasy with those of his imitator Lucian and with the one comparable survival of the nebulous Menippean tradition, Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*. The first distinction to be drawn is that Aristophanes is writing for the comic stage, while Lucian is writing a form of prose or prosimetric entertainment which could conceivably be realised in dramatic form, but may not have been. This distinction may be less important than the audience itself: Aristophanes is writing for a mass audience in a democracy, while Lucian may have commanded large audiences but has his eye on a highly educated urban elite in cities (including Athens) under the Roman Empire. This changed world is broadly reflected in the end product. The fantastic concepts themselves are still unchanged, and characters can still travel to heaven or the Underworld more or less on a whim, but a great deal else is rather different. Lucian's fantasies are considerably more sanitised for Second Sophistic tastes; not that sexual nuances are lost entirely, but the chorus, the phallic costumes and the direct ithuphallic jokes have gone, while there is much greater care with loose ends, and the values of *paideia* and *pepaideumenoī* are in evidence, while there is still a certain anti-intellectualism to be found. Lucian is anything but a philosopher's philosopher, but neither is there anyone really to correspond to the focus

of Strepsiades in the *Clouds*. Nor is there room for a Dicaeopolis or Trygaeus; the central figure tends to be Lucian himself, in one guise or another, not a cunning peasant farmer whose livelihood is threatened by a war. The forms also have changed. Lucian uses in fact a wide range of different genres, some of these possibly embodying innovations of his own. Perhaps the most characteristic is the fusion of prose dialogue with an outline in large measure reminiscent of Old Comedy. The dialogues can alternate between heaven and earth or earth and the Underworld as easily as can the scenes of Old Comedy itself, with the added advantage that changes of scenery need only be imagined rather than represented some way or other on the stage.

Lucian also specialises in miniature dialogues, each of the four sets of which has its own focus, three of them fantastic (*Dialogues of the Dead*, *Dialogues of the Gods* and *Dialogues of the Sea-gods*). These often have the point of emphasising precisely some absurdity left exposed as such (for example the bizarre circumstances of Athena's birth, or Proteus' ability to change into water or fire¹⁹). Some satires appear entirely realistic in character, as when Lucian attacks contemporaries he sees as charlatans. But fantasy is never too far away, even here; he will claim to have witnessed a bogus metamorphosis of Peregrinus Proteus as he left his funeral pyre, only to have the fantasy still further enriched by a deluded devotee immediately afterwards; or he will invent a bogus oracle of his own to match one claimed by Peregrinus himself.²⁰ Other fantasy pieces range from the classic of fantastic travellers' tales *Verae Historiae* down to a number of short rhetorical introductions with their eye on fantastic elements, such as a treatment of Zeuxis' painting of a family of centaurs,²¹ and Lucian may also be responsible for such bizarreries as a paratragic piece celebrating the triumphs of the goddess *Podagra* (Gout), a lawsuit between two consonants before the vowels as jury, or the *Encomium of a fly*.²² Where Lucian produces prose storytelling, again the accent is never too far from the fantastic; in *Philopseudeis*, he has fun with philosophers vying with one another to give very questionable accounts of 'ghost story' experiences, including the first surviving version of the *Sorcerer's Apprentice* tale; or he can contrast adventurous enough Greek tales of friendship with thoroughly far-fetched Scythian examples (*Toxaris*). It should be added that the most fantastic ideas are not always the most successful in actual execution: few students of Lucian's fantasy would be likely to pause for too long over the consonants at law or the praise of the fly. Mock encomium of almost any length is likely to be too long, as Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* was later to show.

How much the world had changed between the two writers of fantasy might be suggested by the opening of Lucian's *Piscator*—and how much has remained the same:

Socrates: Throw, Throw, stone the scoundrel with plenty of stones! Pile up the clods on him; and on top of those, pile on the broken crockery. Strike the villain with sticks. See he doesn't get away; you too, Plato, cast your stone, and you, Chysippus, yes you, and all of you together. Let's charge him together with our shields:

‘Let wallet support wallet and cudgel support cudgel’.

He is our common enemy, and there’s not one of us he hasn’t insulted. And you, Diogenes, take your stick to him, as ever before; don’t let up: give him what he deserves for his blasphemy. What’s this? Are you getting tired, Epicurus and Aristippus? Surely that can’t be right!

Be men, wise ones, and remember your furious anger!

Here we are pitched *in medias res* into the middle of a lynching, with the most unlikely of assailants—dead philosophers, whipped up by Socrates of all people, and all baying for the blood of Lucian (as Parrhesiades, ‘Son of free-speech’) for daring to attack them, as they suppose. The alert reader or audience will pick up from the very first two words that Lucian is evoking the entry of the chorus of Acharnians in Aristophanes’ *Acharnians*—where they are intent on attacking the hero Dicaeopolis for daring to conclude a private peace, with a fourfold *balle balle balle balle*²³ (pelt, pelt, pelt, pelt). But there is a very wide gulf between living crusty war veterans and dead philosophers, as the flagging energies of Epicurus and Aristippus make clear.

Plutus and Timon

One of the most obvious ‘measured miles’ we can use for comparing Lucian and Aristophanes as writers of fantasy is the *Plutus* and its imitation, Lucian’s *Timon*. The basic idea in both is that a way has been found to use the blindness of Wealth, seen as an allegorical figure capable of being bestowed indiscriminately. Aristophanes has him as an old man:

The just Chremylus with his slave Cario has been ordered by the Delphic oracle to take into his household the first person he met, who turns out to be the blind figure of Wealth. He plans to take Wealth to the shrine of Asclepius, so that he can have his sight restored, and then be able to bestow himself only on the good and the just: Poverty as a ghastly old woman debates with him and his companion Blepsidemus the consequences of wealth coming to honest men: the economy will collapse if there is no incentive for those in arts and crafts to work for a living. Her warnings are disregarded and the healing of Wealth takes place. As usual the latter half contains workings out of the consequences: a good man is grateful, a work-shy informer deprived of a living, an old woman has lost a young lover who had really been a legacy-hunter, but now has wealth without the need for over-age sex, and Hermes, the god of thieves, is likewise in dire straits now that there is no need for his services.

Lucian’s working has a great deal in common with his original, both in content and structure:

Zeus is annoyed at accusations that he allows the unjust to prosper: he therefore orders Hermes to restore Wealth to Timon, a man lavish to his false

friends and hangers-on, and now living as a surly disillusioned hermit. Wealth confides to Hermes on the way down from Heaven to Attica that he is reluctant to be restored to Timon, and explains his own paradoxical qualities and the advantages of his blindness. Finally he is left near the surly Timon, and is given a send-off by the latter, who nonetheless does allow himself to find a treasure; when the inevitable sycophants and flatterers turn up, however, he shows that he has learned his lesson, and repels them; he is now misanthrope turned miser.

In some respects, the Old Comic drama and the prose dialogue inhibit comparison; in some respects, too, neither writer has troubled to produce a fantasy that is completely consistent in every detail. The young man's treachery in *Plutus* when abandoning his older lover at the first opportunity could just as easily have disqualified him from entitlement to Wealth, while Timon's sudden conversion back to wanting to be rich seems not altogether convincing either. The figure of Wealth himself is developed for his paradoxical nature:²⁴

By the gods it annoys me to go
Into a stranger's house every time;
That's never yet given me any pleasure,
For if I chance upon a miser's house,
Right away he buries me under the ground,
And if someone approaches who's decent and a friend, asking to borrow
A paltry sum, he says he's never seen him before in his life.
And if I chance upon a madman, he throws me away on women and
gambling,
And I'm bundled out the door without a stitch in no time at all.

In Lucian's case, the personification is developed slightly differently. Sometimes, indeed, Wealth wanders around blind till someone takes him home, frustrating Zeus' expectation that he will find just owners, but the theme is expanded also into an attack on *captatio*.²⁵ Plutus is able to pass Wealth on:

So when I have to move from one man to the next, they throw me into wax tablets with a careful seal, take me up and move me over ... Whoever he may be he snatches me, tablet and all, and runs off with me: instead of the former Pyrrhus or Dromo or Tibeius he has now changed his name to Megacles or Megabyzus or Protarchus ... he is no longer endurable to those he meets, but insults freeborn men and whips his fellow-slaves, testing to see whether he can do that sort of thing, until he falls in with some little minx of a prostitute or fancies himself as a horse-breeder, or gives himself over to toadies ... and then in no time at all the wretch squanders what has been collected from perjury, robbery and villainy.

Spontaneity vs. refinement

In some situations, we have a sense that Aristophanes will go for brilliant spontaneity where Lucian will look for sophistication and refinement. A ‘statutory’ fantastic situation must arise, for example, when any character has to deal with Charon in crossing over to the Underworld. In Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, this comes out thus:²⁶

Dionysus: Let’s go for the ferry.

Charon: Whoah there! Lay her to—

Xanthias: What’s that?

Dionysus: That? The lake, I swear,

The one he mentioned, and I see the boat—

Xanthias: Yes, by Poseidon, and this man here is Charon—

Dionysus: Chair’ O Charon, Chair’ O Charon, Chair’ O Charon!

Charon: Who’s for a rest from misery and stress?

Who’s for the Plain of Forgetfulness? The donkey-clippings
Or Cerberia? To Blazes? Or the Gate of Hell?

It is difficult to find the right pun for *chair’ ō Charōn* (*cheers O Charon?*). There will be plenty of banter on Dionysus’ ineptitude at sea (and a painful backside on the rowers’ benches). Lucian has one rather similar scenario in which a tyrant Megapenthes goes through much the same motions as Dionysus; the outcome is fairly routine.²⁷ But the working in the dialogue *Charon* itself is quite different. Here Charon is above ground, on an (unheard of) day’s shore leave; he meets and engages in dialogue with Hermes, and the two emerge as having a refined professional relationship:²⁸

And indeed, son of Maia, do bear in mind at least that I have never yet asked you to bale out or take an oar. Instead you stretch out on the deck and snore, in spite of your broad shoulders, or if you find some talkative corpse, you have a conversation with him all through the voyage; while I, old man that I am, work both oars on my own.

There is some talk of Charon’s professional competence as a mariner, unsurprisingly, but then total surprise when he offers to ask in the language of Homer, which he must explain:²⁹

When I ferried (Homer) across after his death, I heard him recite a great deal and some of it I still remember, though a severe storm caught us then. For when he began to sing a song that was not fortunate for the passengers, to the effect that Poseidon brought the clouds together and stirred up the sea, tossing in his trident like a ladle, and excited the squalls and much more, confusing the sea with his verses, a dark storm-blast very nearly capsized

the boat; when he was seasick he vomited up most his verses together with Scylla and Charybdis and the Cyclops. So it wasn't difficult to retain a few verses. So tell me

Who is that thickset, tall fellow

Towering over the rest with a head and his broad shoulders?

Further pastiche follows from the god Hermes, who had previously dismissed Charon as an *idiōtēs* who is *hēkista poiētikos* ('a common man without a touch of poetry'). The normal stereotype of the surly boatman has been transformed into that of a refined enquirer, a little naïve in the ways of the upper world (he has never seen gold before), but curious and quick to apply his expertise about how all the historical figures of this world will sooner or later meet their end.

Both writers are adept at ridiculing but at the same time exploiting traditional mythology, and again we can offer a measured mile. In *Wasps*, Bdelycleon catches his wayward father as he tries to escape from confinement at home and make his way to the lawcourts:³⁰

Bdelycleon: Ass, why are you weeping? Because you are being sold today?

Walk quicker. Why are you mourning, unless you are carrying some Odysseus?

Xanthias: But indeed by Zeus he is carrying someone holding on down there—

Bdelycleon: What sort of person? Come on, let's have a look.

Xanthias: This fellow—

Bdelycleon: What's this?

Who are you, man: tell the truth!

Philocleon: Noman, I swear—

Bdelycleon: You're Noman? Where are you from?

From Ithaca, son of Runaway—

Bdelycleon: Noman, by Zeus this won't turn out well for you: quick, drag him out from below: The foul creature, to have hidden (in the donkey's backside)!

Here we have a typically scatological parody of Odysseus' escape from the Cyclops' cave; the old father seems to have his head in a very un-Homeric place. If we turn to Lucian's nearest realisation of the same scenario, *D. Mar.* 2, we have an account of the incident itself without the slapstick, but it is from a novel angle of report. It is evidently the morning after, and Polyphemus is giving an account of the incident to his father Poseidon:

Poseidon: But how did Odysseus escape? For I know full well he wouldn't have been able to move the stone from the entrance.

Cyclops: I removed it, so that I could better catch him as he went out, and sitting beside the entrance I stretched out my hands and searched for

him; I only let out my sheep to pasture, and I told the ram all that he had to do for me.

Poseidon: Now I can see it: they gave you the slip under the sheep. But you should have called on the other Cyclopes to deal with him.

Cyclops: I did call them together, father, and they came. But when they asked the name of the person who was plotting against me and I told them it was Noman, they thought I was out of my mind and went off again.

The episode is a seamless part of Poseidon's interrogation about how Polyphemus came to be blinded. Polyphemus has already been confused at his enemy's change of name, and his head still hurts. Aristophanes' treatment is a momentary gag to illustrate Philocleon's determination to escape; he had previously been trying to abscond up the chimney or down the drainpipe.

Again, the handling of sexual themes between the two authors seems capable of being delicately contrasted. Aristophanes will proliferate sometimes brilliant phallic jokes and puns, aided and abetted by the phallic appendage to the actors' costumes; one thinks immediately of the puns on the heralds' rods and the men's erections in the 'embassy' scene of the *Lysistrata*. Occasionally, Lucian will allow himself a clever innuendo, as when he describes a drunken frolic where his enemy accepts oral sex from a hireling during an enacting of the blinding of Polyphemus.³¹ But in the domain of philological obscenity, he is difficult to keep up with; Lexiphanes' lexicon of lust extends for 14 chapters of one double entendre after another.³²

Conclusions

The fantastic treatment of comic and satirical themes encourages contrasts between Old Comic drama and Sophistic prose. It is largely a matter of taste rather than effectiveness; we can note the preference of Plutarch for Menander's New Comedy over Aristophanes, not long before Lucian himself was writing. Coarseness and incoherence are to be sacrificed in favour of sophistication and consistency.

Notes

- 1 For animal choruses, see Sifakis (1971).
- 2 *Oxyrynchus papyrus* 163.
- 3 *Acharnians* 199; 719–722.
- 4 *Wasps* 764–819.
- 5 *Peace* 102–106.
- 6 *Birds* 1124–1687.
- 7 *Acharnians* 187–199.
- 8 *Acharnians* 325–337; *Thesmophoriazousai* 690–734.
- 9 *Acharnians* 414–476; *Thesmophoriazousai* 86–276; *Frogs* 460–473; 108–115.
- 10 See Appendix.
- 11 *Clouds* 346ff.
- 12 *Clouds* 144–152.

- 13 *Clouds* 747–756; 764–772.
- 14 *Clouds* 218–234.
- 15 *Clouds* 889–1104.
- 16 *Peace* 174ff.
- 17 For the problem, Dover (1972), 134f.
- 18 *Acharnians* 128–200.
- 19 *D. Deorum* 13; *D. Marini* 4.
- 20 *De Morte Peregrini* 29f.
- 21 *Zeuxis sive Aetion* 3–6.
- 22 *Podagra*; *Iudicium Vocalium*; *Muscae Encomium*.
- 23 *Acharnians* 281.
- 24 *Plutus* 234ff.
- 25 *Timon* 21ff.
- 26 *Frogs* 179–187.
- 27 *Kataplous* 8–13.
- 28 *Charon* 1.
- 29 *Charon* 7f.
- 30 *Wasps* 179ff.
- 31 *Pseudologista* 27.
- 32 See c. 9.

13 Getting into heaven

Lucian's *Icaromenippus* and Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*

It is instructive to focus on a pair of works of fantasy in order to note where two authors might draw inspiration from a common motif or a common source and how both can establish their own form of credibility. Lucian's Greek dialogue *Icaromenippus* usefully illustrates what an educated and sophisticated author in the Early Roman Empire can do with the commonplaces of a literary education and a sense of whimsical fun.¹ Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* does the same, and across much of the same subject-matter, but in the coarser idiom of Roman Satire around a century earlier.

At the outset of *Icaromenippus*, we find the Hellenistic philosopher Menippus overheard in the midst of celestial musings:²

‘So it was three thousand stades from the earth to the moon, the first stage; and from there to the sun above, I suppose, five hundred parasangs; and from there to heaven and the acropolis of Zeus would be a day’s journey for an eagle travelling light ...’

We could say that the tone is already set, since Menippus elects to use three completely different and incompatible measuring systems. His mode of propulsion will turn out equally disordered. A puzzled friend asks him the meaning of this outlandish talk, which he has been overhearing for some time. It turns out to be the reckoning of Menippus’ recent journey. The friend thinks he has simply been navigating by the stars, like the Phoenicians, but no, the journey was actually *en tois astrois* ‘among the stars’. Again the friend naturally misunderstands: it must have been a long dream to cover such distances. But not a dream, he is assured; Menippus has actually just visited Zeus in person. This claim seems to elicit some ironic compliments: how can one disbelieve an over-the-clouds man, one of Homer’s ‘heavenly beings’? How did he come by so long a ladder, as he is not as good-looking as Ganymede so as to be snatched up and brought to Zeus by the eagle? By having wings of his own, like those of Daedalus, it turns out, but not fastened on by wax. At this point, the anonymous friend is beginning to be convinced, and Menippus begins to embark on the story: ‘taking a sizeable eagle and also a sturdy vulture and cutting off their wings, complete with joints ...’, before he decides, having left his listener all agog in suspense, to start instead at

the beginning.³ The friend has had no fewer than five wrong guesses as to what Menippus has been up to, and it has taken only three short chapters to ‘establish’ the anonymous friend as the listener all agog for a wonder-tale. Elsewhere, Lucian has actually described the whole business of establishing credibility.⁴ In this instance, the initial flight-path details, soliloquised without awareness of being overheard, are enough to establish the potential for the friend’s credulity; with his listener still hanging open-mouthed and by the ears, Menippus is ready to begin the fantastic narrative in earnest.

The philosopher now narrates how he rejected earthly values to contemplate the mysteries of the universe and hoped for help from his fellow-philosophers, only to find them both mercenary and in disagreement. Here, Menippus seems to draw on the stereotypes of conversion-accounts—one thinks of Justin Martyr’s shopping around the philosophers as a contemporary of Lucian himself,⁵ but Lucian is quick to revitalise their disaccord into fantastic terms (6):

However they laid claim to discerning the bounds of heaven and they measured the sun, they mounted the regions above the moon, and as if they had fallen from the stars they gave an account of their magnitudes, and often, if they had the chance, they ventured to declare the distance between the moon and the sun in cubits, the height of the upper air, and the depths of the sea and the earth’s circumference; and further mapping the circles and putting triangles on squares and various spheres they measured out the universe from there—without even knowing accurately the distance between Megara and Athens.

Among their more mundane celestial speculations there is room for literal slapstick:

‘that the stars drink water, with the sun drawing up the moisture out of the sea as if with a bucket, and distributing the drink to all of them in turn’.⁶

They are similarly divided on the nature and even the existence of the gods themselves. In his confusion, Menippus accordingly decides to investigate the heavens on his own account:⁷

It seemed clear to me that I could not grow wings by any means; but if I were to put on the wings of a vulture or an eagle these alone would be enough to sustain a man’s body—perhaps I could make an attempt. And so taking the birds I carefully cut off the right wing of an eagle and the left of a vulture. Then binding them and fitting them to my shoulders with stout fastenings I fitted grips for my hands at the tips of the primary feathers. Then I practised first jumping up and down and rowing with my hands and as geese do leaving the ground and taking off with my wings. When the business began to work, I already became more daring in my attempt, and going up to the acropolis I let myself go down the precipice into the theatre. And when I flew without

mishap, I already had higher ambitions and took off from Parnes or Hymettus and flew to Geraneia, then from there to Acrocorinthus, then over Pholoe and Erymanthus as far as Taygetus.

And so when I had become fully fledged in my carefully practised enterprise, I no longer thought like a young fledgling, but went up to Olympus, and having provisioned myself as lightly as possible, this time I made straight for heaven, at first dizzy by the height, but after a while even this I was able to do easily. And when I had left the clouds far behind and was already in the region of the moon, I felt myself getting tired, especially in the left wing, the vulture's. So I pressed on and resting on the moon, looking down to the earth ...

There is nothing in Menippus' narration that sounds blatantly impossible or absurd, and only one thing that actually is so: to obtain and maintain the right span and speed for the wings. Every other step has at least an air of plausibility and a feel of corroborative detail, especially the sense that the flight is attained by systematic and prolonged practice. It is now time for the friend to interrupt once more and ask details of the view of the earth from the moon. The earth was so tiny as to be only recognisable because Menippus took his bearings from the Colossus of Rhodes and the Pharos of Alexandria, but he was able to obtain a detailed view of all human life. The friend notes that this is contradictory, prompting Menippus to fill in a detail he had overlooked.

In his frustration at being unable to focus on the earth, he is approached by the philosopher Empedocles, once supposedly carried up to the moon from the crater of Etna, who is able to give him a tip on sympathetic magic: by waving the eagle's wing alone, he can obtain the eagle's keen-sightedness in his right eye.⁸ This apparent folk-remedy works, and he is now able to see the whole earth in minute detail: first scandals going on in royal households, philosophers disgracing themselves in their private lives and different nationalities concerned with their typical pursuits. The whole ensemble is compared to a chaotic chorus, then to a striving of ants. Here we are in the business of literary presentation of rhetorical moralising, similar to the thought-world of Maximus of Tyre's orations on the one hand, or Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* on the other.⁹ There may also be contemporary allusion at one point (18):

It occurred to me to laugh especially at those who fought over boundary-lines on earth, and those who prided themselves on farming the plain of Sicyon, or having the district of Oenoe in Marathon or possessing a thousand plethra at Acharnae. As the whole of Greece as it seemed to me from above was the breadth of four fingers, I reckoned Attica was tiny. So I supposed how little these rich people had to feel conceited about. For the most wealthy of them in terms of acres seemed to me to be farming one of those Epicurean atoms.

Here it would be hard to miss an allusion to the celebrated second-century sophistic grandee Herodes Atticus, with his estates at Corinth and Cephisia,¹⁰ and on

whom Lucian's reactions elsewhere seem elusive or equivocal. As Menippus departs, the moon herself complains to him and asks him to take a message to Zeus, registering her disgust at the slanders against her by hypocritical philosophers. Little need be spent on the rest of the journey: 'With the sun on my right I flew through the stars and on my third day came near to Heaven'. Dismissing the temptation to pass himself off as an eagle with only half an eagle outfit, he knocks for admission, and Hermes brings him in, to an indignant Zeus and a very worried assemblage of gods, in case he is followed by a whole host of airborne humans. His identity is demanded in a suitable Homeric tag ('Who art thou among men ...?'),¹¹ but Zeus softens to his explanations and offers him a tour of heaven, with some divine conversation en route. The details of the conversation are noted, with Zeus naturally talking about the weather. Menippus now witnesses the daily routine of Providence: Zeus bending over four successive apertures in the base of heaven, paying attention to prayers, oaths, omens and sacrifices, responding with appropriate administrative action to each, and so maintaining the responsibilities of Providence, before settling the minute details of the weather: 'Today let it rain in Scythia, let it thunder in Libya, let it snow in Greece; North Wind, blow in Libya; South Wind, have a rest; West Wind, blow up a storm in the Adriatic; and over Cappadocia let there be around a thousand bushels of hail'.¹² The literal and mundane details leave a sense of celestial chores and arbitrary inconsequence.

Menippus is now allowed to be present at a banquet of the gods, placed with the more doubtful deities such as Pan or Sabazius; individual gods give him their special products, but it is left to Ganymede to slip him some illicit nectar behind Zeus' back. After-dinner entertainment is reliant on human literature that celebrates the gods (Hesiod's *Theogony*, Pindar's *Hymns*); they then sleep it off during the night, which still somehow happens in spite of the continued presence of the sun-god Helios.

In the morning, an assembly is held to discuss the moon's complaint against philosophers. Zeus delivers a general attack on them for their hypocrisy, contentiousness, irreverence and the rest; after rejecting various penalties from the assembly in uproar, Zeus decides to blast the philosophers with the thunderbolt—but not yet, as there is a four-month sacred truce in force.¹³ Menippus is to have his wings removed to prevent return and be escorted back to earth by Hermes; he is now off to give the good news to the philosophers themselves.

Such, then, is one approach to fantasy in a prose satirist in later antiquity. Lucian has clearly sought and largely attained the effect of a seamless narrative; there are no breaks in dramatic illusion of a kind routine in Aristophanes, moving on from one abrupt invention to the next; *Icaromenippus* might be seen as comic dialogue, but the dialogue texture itself progressively diminishes to leave a tall-story-cum-satirical-travelogue. To some extent, Lucian relies on the established and traditional mythology that sets the gods either in Olympus or in this instance in heaven (the latter destination is obviously the more suitable to be reached only by some fantastic flying device). From this, the writer has been able to develop a Heath-Robinson style *reductio ad absurdum* for the operations of Providence. Zeus has in effect a celestial sorting-office for prayers and the like,

giving a sense of the gods performing their daily routines in the most literal way. Lucian commits himself to four apertures in the floor of heaven with a golden throne beside each, but otherwise offers no details of heaven at all, other than that it has a front door with Hermes as a doorkeeper. There is no detail of the landscape of the moon, and (something of an inconsistency) no explanation of how the moon seems to be a place where Menippus can rest and meet Empedocles at one moment, and a female deity able to complain about philosophers the next. There may well be a calculation that the speed and assurance of the narrative glosses over this obvious difficulty, especially when the scenes observed from the moon intervene.

Much of the material of the piece recalls literary ingredients that Lucian's audience could have been expected to recognise. The whole sequence of Aristophanes' *Peace* underlies the scenes of preparation, the ascent, the arrival and meeting with Hermes and the moon persecuted by philosophers. In each case, Lucian has smoothed and sanitised his predecessor. Menippus is spared the indignity of defecating to feed the dung-beetle; his costume is still grotesque, but in an 'acceptable' sort of way. Hermes is not this time foul-mouthed and cursing the intruder, nor is he the factotum left behind to mind the celestial pots and pans. Nor do we have the problems in *Peace*, of Peace herself incarcerated in some indeterminate landscape.

Detecting materials Lucian might have known from local or oral sources is more speculative, but increased awareness of Near Eastern literature should prompt us to look towards the Sumero-Akkadian myths of *Adapa* or *Etana*. The hero is likewise offended, is prompted to break the wing of an eagle and come up to heaven, chooses to taste or not to taste forbidden food of the gods, and notes the tiny appearance of the earth seen from above.¹⁴ One thinks too of the trickster narrative wherein the lying narrator confesses to some sort of theft of food from heaven (the story of Heriger's guest in the *Cambridge Songs*¹⁵ touches on the same area as the theft of nectar noted here).

Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis divi Claudii*¹⁶

A vexed question in the past has been the degree of indebtedness to Menippus himself, a real satirical writer with Cynic sympathies of the Hellenistic era.¹⁷ Comparison with the *Apocolocyntosis*, a Latin Menippean satire for other reasons, shows community of material, right down to a shared quotation when Menippus/the Emperor Claudius reaches heaven.

Seneca's satire on the death and deification of the Emperor Claudius in 54 CE offers a number of points of comparison with the *Icaromenippus*. Here, we do not have a celestial explorer rising to heaven, but a Roman emperor expecting deification. Once more, there are elaborate preliminaries concerning the credibility of the author's information; this time the subject has the usual trappings of a historian who will write without fear or favour in a new age of freedom following the tyrannical abuses of Claudius, though he derives his testimony of the emperor's ascent from a guardian of the Appian Way who previously witnessed the ascent

of Caligula's sister, Drusilla, to general disbelief.¹⁸ In other words, he has made it all up ...

The decision is taken by the Fates to end Claudius' misery on earth; his successor Nero is given a generous superfluity of thread, while Claudius is to expire by a mercy killing. His spirit is said to have departed by his back passage; this ignominious end elicits the comment *vae me, puto, concacavi me* ('Oh dear, I think I've made a mess of myself!')¹⁹ The narrator cannot confirm this for certain, but does add *certe omnia concacavit*: 'He certainly made a mess of everything'.

We are now offered an account of Claudius' arrival in heaven.²⁰ It is clear from the historians, as it is here, that Claudius suffered some debilitating condition, perhaps cerebral palsy, which affected his speech and control of movement. The satirist, with a strong personal grudge against Claudius because of his own exile, is unsparing of the emperor's physical impairments. Heracles as *alexikakos* (warder-off of ills) has to be summoned to deal with the situation.

Now follows what might well be a topos in fantastic writing, a kind of 'St. Peter-at-the-gate' joke. Even Heracles is disconcerted by the stranger's appearance, thinks his thirteenth labour has arrived and addresses the stranger with the same familiar Homeric tag as in *Icaromenippus*: 'Who art thou, whence? Thy city and thy kin!'²¹ His companion the goddess Febris (Fever) now intervenes to explain his origin at Lyons, but his attempt with a wave of the hand to have her executed is ignored, as if the bystanders had been his own freedmen.²² But Claudius seems to strike up a bond with Heracles, in front of whose temple he had presided over courts in Rome. When the text resumes after a lacuna, a debate is in progress on Claudius' fitness for deification. Janus is against, as Claudius will lower the status of divinity, but Diespiter is in favour in view of Claudius' links to Augustus. These are set at naught, however, when the first *princeps* in person makes his maiden speech and dissociates himself from Claudius:²³

'This man, conscript fathers, who seems to you not to be able to get a fly to move, used to kill men as easily as a dog squats down ... Tell me, Divine Claudius: why did you condemn any one of those you killed before establishing the case and hearing it? Where does this usually happen? It doesn't happen in heaven'.

This speech settles Claudius' fate; he is now condemned to the Underworld, throttled and then escorted below by Mercury. His slow wit is underlined by the fact that he only realises he is dead when he witnesses his own funeral procession on the way down.²⁴ He can now meet all those he summarily executed and himself be subjected to a one-sided procedure, before the ultimate humiliation of being given over to a freedman of his predecessor Gaius (Caligula).

The piece is frequently cited as an example of so called 'Menippean' satire, though whether that term relates only to the uses of a mixture of prose and verse or also designates some aspect of the contents we still do not know for certain. The general similarity to a number of Lucianic satires is clear; *Icaromenippus* itself we have already noted, but also the *Deorum Concilium* where the gods debate the

eligibility of new arrivals to claim divinity; and pieces like the *Kataplous*, which deals with the punishment of a dead tyrant in the world below.

Where the *Apocolocyntosis* comes into its own in comparison with Lucian is the much greater emphasis on the contemporary. This piece is very specifically tied to the person of Claudius, his dysfunctional family relationships, and his (supposed) unawareness of his own court. His bad relationships with wives and freedmen are singled out for lampoon, and the general style admits a good deal of colloquialism and related humour, some of it decidedly coarse, where Lucian's Greek pieces favour propriety and only limited engagement with the world of the here and now.²⁵ Seneca is not quite a Roman Aristophanes, but at times he can come close.

Notes

- 1 On Lucian's Menippean Satire, Relihan (1993), 103–118.
- 2 *Icaromenippus* 1.
- 3 *Icaromenippus* 1–3.
- 4 *Hermotimus* 74.
- 5 Justin *Dialogue with Trypho* 2.
- 6 *Icaromenippus* 7.
- 7 *Icaromenippus* 10f.
- 8 *Icaromenippus* 14.
- 9 Compare for example Marcus' use of the view from above, discussed by R.B. Rutherford (1989), 155–161.
- 10 Noted by Schwarz (1965), 71.
- 11 *Odyssey* 1.170 and elsewhere.
- 12 For the likely sources of this passage, Anderson, *Philologus* 124 (1980), 159–161.
- 13 Lucian's gods are never short of excuses for not using their power, cf. *Jupiter Tragoedus* 24f.; 32.
- 14 Dalley (1989), 182–202.
- 15 *Cambridge Songs* 24.
- 16 Commentary by A.P. Ball (New York, 1902) is still useful; see also P.T. Eden (Cambridge 1984); Relihan (1993), 75–90.
- 17 See now on Menippean treatment Relihan (1993). 12–36.
- 18 *Apocolocyntosis* 1.
- 19 *Apocolocyntosis* 4.3, cf. Suetonius, *Claudius* 44.
- 20 *Apocolocyntosis* 5.
- 21 *Odyssey* 1.170, as in *Icaromenippus* 23. For further detail, c. 2.
- 22 *Apocolocyntosis* 6.2.
- 23 *Apocolocyntosis* 10.
- 24 *Apocolocyntosis* 12.3.
- 25 There has been general puzzlement about the meaning of the title. At least in the extant text, there is no mention of any pumpkin, though it makes sense enough to think of a pumpkinification as a kind of comic apotheosis. A Fête du Potiron (Festival of King Pumpkin) was celebrated in September at the Paris Halles Centrales. The largest pumpkin was given a paper crown; the pumpkin was then accorded mock worship before being cut in pieces to be auctioned for soup. So Funk and Wagnall's *Standard Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and legend*, s.v. pumpkin. We could say that Claudius has aspirations to royalty, which are then ignominiously dissolved.

14 The summation of fantasy

Lucian's *True Histories*

We have had occasion to visit Lucian's main contribution to fantasy frequently enough; it is time to examine its contribution as a whole.¹ The first four chapters set the tone. As athletes need to relax, so do intellectuals; the author will however combine some stimulation with the leisure he offers, in the form of parody of established authors. He singles out for special mention Ctesias and Iambulus, who wrote on India and the Indian Ocean respectively; and Odysseus' tales to the Phaeacians in the *Odyssey*. The remainder is up to the reader to detect. Lucian does not speak of fantasy as such, but rather of falsehood. His one true claim, as he himself famously insists, is that he is telling lies and explicitly so, where his predecessors have claimed to be telling the truth.² This is a theme which Lucian pursues in several works: the title *Philopseudeis* refers to a gathering of philosophers who betray their gullibility over ghost stories and the like; the treatise *How to write history* dwells on the falsehoods of the lying historians of the present. Tales of Scythian friendships in *Toxaris* at least come under the suspicion of the fictitious Greek listener to whom they are told.³ The *True Histories* both in title and content indulges in all three: there are parodies of philosophic beliefs, bogus historiography and barbarian romance, and the author has a strong ambition to out-do and out-lie, while maintaining plausibility throughout.

From the sea to the moon

Lucian, then, begins his voyage narrative. It is from the Pillars of Heracles *westwards*; in that direction there will have been little by way of accounts against which to check his own narrative, and he can expect little fear of contradiction. His motives are intellectual curiosity, including finding the ending of the Ocean and the people on the other side.⁴ Similar intellectual curiosity motivates the flight of Menippus in *Icaromenippus*, where the traveller is concerned to resolve the variety of philosophical speculations on the nature of the heavens.⁵ In the *True Histories*, we are typically just about to hear of the continent on the other side when the narrative all too suspiciously breaks off at the end of book II. Lucian has a crew of 50 like-minded individuals, recalling the crew of the Argo itself. A typical touch is the high cost of hiring the master; as in *Icaromenippus*, the narrator has to pay substantially for expert assistance. Lucian reinforces an air of

normality with routine provisioning of his skiff, and the account of a lengthy gale till he reaches *terra incognita*. With normal credibility now established, at last the transition can take place to the world of the absurd. Lucian and his men find an inscription on a faded bronze stele to commemorate the fact that Heracles and Dionysus had come this far;⁶ they measure the gigantic footprint of the former as a plethron (a hundred Greek feet), with Dionysus' print predictably less. A river of wine supports the claim of the inscription. They find wine-fish in the river and temper their strength with water-fish, just as ancient drinkers dilute wine with water. Lucian's account is not quite as outlandish as first appears. His contemporary Aulus Gellius gives an account in all seriousness of calculating the length of a stadium based on the length of Heracles' footprint;⁷ we are faced here with similar logic of the absurd.

The ensuing encounter with the Vinewomen has already been discussed. But once more, the plausibility is enhanced by an aside that some spoke Lydian, some Indian, but most spoke Greek—just as we are not surprised to find that Greek is the language of the Underworld⁸ and, in due course, will turn out to be the language of the moon. The absurdity can now take a greater leap: a whirlwind carries the ship into the air, and it is able to put in at an island that is 'bright and spherical and shining with a great light'. We are not told in so many words as yet that this is actually the moon, but it is inferred that another world down below is the earth they have just left.⁹ This arrival at the moon prompted Photius to claim in the ninth century that Lucian's principal source for his travels is the *Wonders beyond Thoule* of Antonius Diogenes, who is known to have described a journey to the moon.¹⁰ Here the moon is presented as an inhabited land, whereas in *Icaromenippus* 20, it seems to be an animate female body capable of talking to passing travellers. At this point, Lucian's crew is arrested by Hippogypes ('vulture dragoons'), the first of a vast array of hybrid creatures of fantastic nature and dimensions ('the vultures are large and most of them three-headed, with each of their quills the size of a large merchant ship'). The travellers are brought before the king of the moon Endymion, who of course speaks Greek; the usual version of his being ravished by Artemis/Selene is not developed here but rather rationalised. Endymion encourages Lucian's party to join him in prosecuting a quarrel with the Sun-people over a colony on the Morning Star. The ensuing 'Star Wars' episode absurdly crosses Aristophanes' *Birds* and Xenophon's *Anabasis* with a general pastiche of the clichés of historiography: there is the familiar reticence in describing the most extreme incredible details¹¹ and Herodotean indications of vast heterogeneous forces, in this case not from the Persian Empire but from the cosmos as a whole. There is an air of Heath Robinson once more about the means involved; since the Selenites have infantry, they must have a surface to fight on, so giant spiders are detailed to spin a web for the purpose.¹² A standard Greek battle piece sees the defeat of the Selenites when late reinforcements turn the tide of the battle with the arrival of *Nephelokentauroi* (Cloud-centaurs) on the side of Phaethon the Sun-king, who then blockades the moon with an Aristophanic Cloud-barrier¹³ and imposes a rather Thucydidean-sounding peace treaty. The Morning Star colony is to be a joint enterprise, but a tribute is to be paid of dew, traditionally associated

with the moon, from that body to the sun. Endymion offers his own son in marriage to Lucian, who politely declines the honour, just as Homer has Odysseus politely avoid marriage with Alcinous' daughter Nausicaa.¹⁴

After the Star Wars, the little green men: this is an opportunity for an ethnographic digression, like that of Homer on the practices of the Cyclopes, or Herodotus on any foreign peoples.¹⁵ Selenites change sex in their mid-twenties and have intercourse through the knee rather than elsewhere, or alternatively they harvest men from a previously planted penis-tree. Some of the nonsense is closest perhaps to Herodotus' description of the mores of the Scythians, and there is even a hint of marsupial creatures in the extraordinary anatomy of the moon-men. A sort of celestial observation post is also provided, corresponding to the well-openings in the floor of heaven in *Icaromenippus*.¹⁶

From Lamptown to the whale

The narrative fragments a little before the next major episode. Lucian visits a miniature town of lamps, a traditionally 'animate' community because of the popular idea of living flames.¹⁷ The sketch offers a demonstration of how a whole community can be imagined, complete with social hierarchy, courts empowered to put out delinquent lamps—and a conversation (not detailed) between Lucian and his own lamp. A master-stroke follows: close to the clouds, Lucian passes by *Nephelokkugia* (Clouducuckooland), the ultimate fantasy place, but cannot stop because of an unfavourable wind.¹⁸ This dispenses with the author's having to confirm or deny the details in Aristophanes' own description, which by implication, however, he takes on trust. Returning to the Ocean, Lucian records his ship as having been swallowed by a whale, only to find yet more communities trapped inside it, including two human survivors of a previous shipwreck, Scintharus and his son Cinyras. This idea of a world inside a giant creature's mouth is well established in folk tale,¹⁹ and unsurprisingly, Lucian's crew is involved in another war with hostile creatures inside the whale itself; they finally escape by smoking the creature to death and evacuating their own vessel at the very last moment.

From the Isle of the Blest to the far continent

The next major episode offers much more familiar territory. The crew land on the Isle of the Blest, where amid a *locus amoenus* they can consort with heroes of the Trojan War, as well as celebrated philosophers and literary men.²⁰ This offers the opportunity for Lucian to interview Homer and to dispense with some of the myths associated with him. We are now assured that the bard began with the wrath of Achilles simply because that was how it occurred to him, that he was not blind, that the *Iliad* came first and so on. The whole interview has a strong flavour of the matter-of-fact about it—right down to a banal couplet offered to Lucian by the bard as a kind of autograph.²¹ Because of an attempted misdemeanour of Scintharus' son with Helen of Troy, Lucian's men are moved on; after passing the place of punishment and the island of Dreams, they put in at Calypso's

island, delivering a letter from Odysseus promising to come to her after all. Here, in effect, we have Lucian himself incorporated into a revision of the *Odyssey*.²² Miscellaneous minor adventures include a forest in the middle of the sea, which Lucian navigates by sailing on top of the forest canopy; or a canyon in the ocean crossed absurdly by means of a water-bridge; or a meeting with phallonauts whose erections serve as ships' masts—and who naturally enough find Lucian's own ship an object of wonder.²³ After encounters with bull-headed men and ass-legged women, they are shipwrecked on the other continent, and that is where the author leaves them at the end of book 2, promising, however implausibly, to relate their adventures there in subsequent books.²⁴

Techniques and themes of fantasy

It is difficult to find the measure of Lucian's fantasy among so much. There is a mixture of imitations of already established travel adventures and common-sense deductions from them. To this is added a blend of comic exaggerations and bogus precision; much of the detail is contrived, so that when the ship is in a river of wine, the crew are said to have *oinisamenoi*—‘having taken on a supply of wine drawn up from the river’, just as one would normally be *hydreusamenoi*, ‘having taken on a supply of fresh water’.²⁵ It is possible to stand back from the work and notice how thoroughly it has absorbed virtually all the elements that have formed the subject of previous chapters. We encounter the kind of otherworldly dialogues with which we began, with an interview with Homer himself, no less. We have little of fable material, but on the other hand a great many fantastic animal hybrids, whether in the cosmic creatures or the hostile marine exhibits inside the whale. Central to the fantastic narrative is the voyage itself and its corollary, the investigation of otherworldly communities. Dreams are represented in the dedication of a whole island to them; horror is intrinsic to such seductresses as the Vinewomen and the cannibal Asslegs. A prominent place is found for the remodelling of myth, as when the Asslegs at the end of book 2 suggest a hybrid of the Sirens and Circe; metamorphosis is intrinsic to the nature of the Vinewomen, duly compared by Lucian himself to the pictures of Daphne turned to laurel.²⁶ Fantasy banqueting appears also, in the lavish automatic service of drinks on the Isle of the Blest. And there is at least a sprinkling of sexual material, both in details of the fantastic creatures and in the bizarre propagation of humans on the moon.

Grouping and spacing

Beside the thematic ingredients and the techniques suggested here, there is a clear literary repertoire, which Lucian acknowledges. Homer, as so often in Second Sophistic Greek literature, offers a mainstay,²⁷ with Herodotus and Xenophon not far behind. The Hellenistic *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius, by contrast, achieves a passing allusion, but little beyond. One suspects there is more of Ctesias and Iambulus than we can hope to trace. There seems clearly a kind of template of Sindbad-like adventures, suggesting an underlay of popular oriental narrative

material,²⁸ but little that can safely be attributed to, for example, the *Alexander Romance*, with its celestial basket and bathyscaphe, neither of which can claim a counterpart here. The world-view is of course strongly Hellenocentric, with the solitary appearance of Numa among barbarian admissions to the Isle of the Blest in a work so clearly of the Roman Empire.²⁹

Narrative pace is an important ingredient in controlling the imaginative effort of the piece. Lucian is able to offer a necessary digression from the historiographical parodies when he describes the mores of the Selenites or the world inside the whale. He has also to take care not to allow each book to fragment into too many single small incidents or fall into over-long cataloguing, as of the personnel of the Island of the Blest. Sometimes, contiguous episodes may be connected. There are three extraordinary events when the gooseneck of the ship sprouts feathers, the mast bears fruit and the helmsman's bald head sprouts hair; these events can be taken to prefigure the encounter with a thick forest in the middle of the sea.

One of the related problems of sustaining fantasy is the control of repetitious or similar material. There is at least a sense in which, for example, the Vinewomen and the Asslegs are variations one of the other, and Lucian has taken care to keep them at opposite ends of the text.³⁰ We might say the same in another respect of the Vinewomen and the Arboreal men on the moon. Once Lucian has introduced the idea of setting up trophies to commemorate the victory in the Sky-battle after a territorial dispute, he likewise introduces the motif for the battle between the forces of Aeolocentaur and Thalassopotes after an accusation of dolphin-rustling, where the trophy is set up on the whale's back.³¹ Moreover, the naval battle between the fleets observed from the whale is in turn similar to the encounters of the Kolokythopiratai and the Karyonautai in book 2,³² and there are doublet escorts to avoid arrest on the voyages from the moon and the Isle of the Blest.³³

At the same time, control of the most complex detail is maintained, for example, in the precise specification of the nature of the so-called *Anemodromoi* ('Windrunners').³⁴

The Wind-runners are infantry, but they fly in the air without wings. And this is their means of propulsion: they wear their long tunics fastened with girdles below, and letting the wind billow through them they use them as sails and move along just like boats.

Lucian's persona in his travels

It is worthwhile to notice in passing the role Lucian himself plays from time to time, as author and narrator in his own right and, unusually, under his own name. Once again it is tempting to see him as a second Odysseus and a second Xenophon. He is careful to specify where he has been able to observe or make contact with his own family, as when he talks directly to his own lamp or sees his family from the telescope device on the moon.³⁵ It is he who spots the Asslegs and takes the initiative in action against them, or who opens the secret letter from Odysseus to Calypso and carefully humours the rightful recipient. It is he too who

takes satisfaction that his own future place in the Isle of the Blest is to be among the best people, or that he is not to be associated with the lying writers who will face punishment for their lies in the afterlife,³⁶ and yet he can claim that Homer has composed a couplet specially for the author himself. And finally, it is he who assures us in his own person at the end of book 2 that more adventures in the far continent will follow. And always there is the touch of precise observation: 'on the fifth day of the ninth month, about the second opening—for the whale did it once an hour, so that we told time by the openings ...'³⁷

A specimen episode: the Isle of the Blest

It is worthwhile to look closely at Lucian's presentation of the Island of the Blest to compare the imaginative construction here with his efforts elsewhere. Sometimes the materials seem to be lifted bodily from other compositions. Rhadamanthus judges a claim between Alexander and Hannibal as to which is the better general, as in *Dialogues of the Dead* 25. The key reason for preferring Alexander is here missed out—that Hannibal was defeated by Scipio; on balance, it seems more probable that the shorter version arises from the listing of several lawsuits together here.³⁸ At times, it might appear that he is distributing details at random, as when he has the heroes here listening to the Homeric Epics and the lyrics of Eunomus, Arion, Anacreon and Stesichorus, whereas in *Icaromenippus*, the gods are disclosed as listening to Hesiod's *Theogony* as well as Pindar's first Hymn.³⁹ But the choice appears to be deliberate; the heroes naturally prefer the *Iliad* in which they distinguish themselves, where the gods are interested in their own divine genealogies. The presentation of philosophers is overall less sharply satirical than normal in Lucian for this class of individual. Empedocles is refused admission, presumably on grounds of charlatanism, as in *D. Mort.* 6.4. Plato is absent, to allow a re-use of his famous absence from the cast-list of the philosopher's own *Phaedo* 59B; Stoic austerity and Academic indecision dictate that both groups should be absent. This leaves the *bons viveurs*, Epicurus and Aristippus, and a change of role for Diogenes, now married to the courtesan Laïs instead of relying on his own sexual resources. There is some inconsistency, however: the custom on the island is to be openly promiscuous, with no jealousy or resentment. That is inconsistent with the elopement of Kinyras with Helen, since Menelaus should not be jealous.⁴⁰ But the proliferation of so many small details makes it easy for Lucian to let this one slip through. The presentation of Socrates among the dead is similar here to the version in *D. Mort.* 6.4ff., except that the philosopher here denies his attraction to good-looking boys, where in Hades he admits it.⁴¹ Pythagoras is present after completing seven transmigrations, but with his basic identity still unresolved.

Lucian rather overdoes the enigmatic nature of the heroes' bodies: they are intangible and without flesh, but live and move and think and talk, as if their souls go about in the semblance of their physical selves. At the same time, they eat and drink at their symposia in the normal way.⁴² There seems a deliberate contrast to the implied nature of the blood-nourished animated corpses in *Odyssey* 11. By simply stating the contradictory indications as fact, Lucian cuts through the

kind of metaphysical speculation on the nature of the soul that bedevils philosophical, and particularly Platonic, enquiry.

The details of the banqueting may look back to the automatic dumb-waiters in evidence in the service of Homer's Hephaestus,⁴³ but now carried a stage further. Instead of growing wheat, bread-trees bear ready-made loaves, while other goblet-bearing trees serve as automatic drinks machines, supplying of their own accord the wishes of the individual drinkers.

The interview with Homer is calculated to settle some standard problems of Homeric scholarship in the simplest possible way. Homer is corrected over his inaccurate account of the Gates of Dreams but upheld for his correct description of Calypso's cave; the blood from the sky-battle is compared to Zeus' shower of blood at the death of Sarpedon (*Il.* 16.459). There is no treating of Homer as a liar and a charlatan, as Lucian presents Hesiod in the *Conversation with Hesiod*; Homer is said to be in league with Odysseus against Thersites, but there is no hint of the accusation developed later by Philostratus, that the poet had conspired with Odysseus to write Palamedes out of the Trojan War. Instead, Lucian presents a new set of funeral games for the heroes: one thinks of Philostratus' account of the ghosts of Protesilaus and other heroes still exercising near the site of Troy itself. Lucian's Homer then adds a new war in which the heroes led by Achilles, Ajax and Theseus defeat the criminals from the punishment islands, Phalaris, Busiris and their kind, and Socrates is once more a war hero, as in real life at Delium. Homer presents Lucian with a copy of his account of this new war, but it is conveniently lost. Again one thinks of Philostratus, who offers an account of Achilles destroying an invasion of Amazons to his island paradise in the Black Sea. A romantic extension offers us a return to the beginning of the fantastic world of the *Odyssey*. Lucian cites a confidential letter he has opened from Odysseus to Calypso, offering an 'update'; it is the take-it-or-leave-it banality of the information that is striking:⁴⁴

When I first sailed off from you after building my raft, I was shipwrecked and was only just rescued by Leucothea to the land of the Phaeacians: they sent me home where I found many suitors of my wife living a life of luxury at my expense. I killed them all, but later on I was killed by Telegonus, a son I had by Circe.

Odysseus goes on to offer to escape the Isle of the Blest and take up Circe's old offer of immortality. Here again there is a slight slip, as the heroes on the Isle already have immortality anyway. Tellingly, Lucian admits to giving Calypso the information about Penelope he thinks she wants to hear ... but subtly avoids telling us what it is.

The ultimate fantasy?

Lucian's creation does succeed in blending together a wide range of themes that can be used as a basis for fantasy. How successful is it as a summation of what the ancient world would have understood as embodying it? Lucian knows his classics of impossible narrative, both Epic and Historiographical, and in his considerable

output of prose pieces, he develops much of the same sort of material in similar directions. Here is a bogus historian of the Parthian war in action in *Historia* 29:

He has seen everything in such detail that he says the Parthian serpents (this is a sign to show numbers: I think the serpent precedes a thousand men) are live creatures of enormous size; that they originate in Persia a little beyond Iberia, that they are fastened on long poles and are carried along on high and inspire fear when the Parthians are driving forward from a distance, but at close quarters in the heat of battle they are let loose and go against the enemy; that they had actually swallowed many of our troops, others they had coiled around and suffocated and crushed.

The tale could easily have belonged in the battle between moon and sun-people in *Verae Historiae* 1. We might be tempted to feel that Lucian's mosaic is too fragmentary and linear in its outline, and that unlike the Greek novels with their central loving couple, the adventures here have no real sense of progression towards any goal, let alone any sort of satisfactory ending. There is no specific quest for information from a particular individual (though Rhadamanthus supplies some in passing) and no precious object to be won and brought back, like the Golden Fleece or the prospect of immortality in this life, of the kind Lucian includes both in *Icaromenippus* and *Nekyomanteia*. Nor is there any consistent enemy running through the text, like the Paapis of Antonius Diogenes, or any consistently protecting deity either. The absence of a traditional plot serves to emphasise the concentration on fantasy itself and on setting up the next lie. But the major episodes (the moon, the whale, the Isle of the Blest) do bind together subsidiary details and motifs, and each poses at least a question: how will the ship get down from the moon? How will the crew escape from the whale? What happens when they have to leave the Island? And of course how did Lucian return from the far continent? Or was there ever a third book at all? The minor episodes can offer cleverly co-ordinated sets of points, as when Lucian's crew live off the land on the island of cheese when it supplies their bread and meat, and the milk from the grapes their drink. All in all, we are looking at wonder-narrative rather than romance, and we are in the same sort of world much of the time as the paradoxography of Achilles Tatius or the Indian travels of Apollonius of Tyana.

In answer to the question, then, as to what the text tells us about the nature of Greek fantasy: it has to be beyond reasonable possibility, with at least an element of the absurd or incredible and a tendency to exaggerate but, as so often, still never quite losing sight of the normal and logical as well.

Notes

- 1 Useful modern commentary by Georgiadou and Larmour (with an inclination towards allegorical interpretation), 1998. Valuable synthesis in von Möllendorff (2000), who however strangely doubts the work's humour. Discussion in ní Mheallaigh (2014), 206–260, richly suggestive.

- 2 *VH* 1.4.

- 3 For such texts as a collection, ní Mheallaigh (2014).
- 4 *VH* 1.5. For available geographical theory, Romm (1992), 124–140.
- 5 *Icaromenippus* 5–8.
- 6 For similar commemoration of Alexander, cf. Philostratus *VA* 2.43.
- 7 *NA* 1.1.
- 8 *VH* 1.8; *D. Mort.* 25.2.
- 9 *VH* 1.10.
- 10 *Codex* 166.111b. Unfortunately, the date of Antonius Diogenes’ work is not actually known.
- 11 Cf. Herodotus 1.193 and passim. Similar reticence at *VH* 1.18, 1.25.
- 12 *VH* 1.15.
- 13 Cf. Aristophanes *Birds* 1124–1162.
- 14 *VH* 1.21; cf. *Odyssey* 7.311f.
- 15 Cyclopes: *Odyssey* 9.106–115; ethnographies: e.g. Herodotus 2 (Egyptians); 4 (Scythians).
- 16 *VH* 1.26; *Icaromenippus* 25.
- 17 *VH* 1.3; cf. Apuleius *Met.* 2.11 (the lamp as Sibyll).
- 18 *VH* 1.29.
- 19 Cf. Stith Thompson Motif R245, ‘The Whale-Boat’; cf. also c.4 n.32 (the woman trapped in the world inside the elephant).
- 20 *VH* 2.17f.
- 21 *VH* 2.20, 28.
- 22 *VH* 2.29; 35f.
- 23 *VH* 2. 42; 43; 45.
- 24 *VH* 2.47; for a similar spurious promise, cf. Beazley, (1911) p.15.
- 25 *VH* 1.9.
- 26 *VH* 1.8.
- 27 On Homer in the Second Sophistic, Kindstrand (1973).
- 28 Cf. Anderson (2007), 212ff.
- 29 *VH* 2.17.
- 30 *VH* 1.8; 2.46.
- 31 *VH* 1.18; 1.42.
- 32 *VH* 1.10–42; 2.37–39.
- 33 *VH* 1.28f; 2.29.
- 34 *VH* 1.13.
- 35 *VH* 1.29; 26.
- 36 *VH* 2.46; 35; 27; 31.
- 37 *VH* 1.40; cf. *Icaromenippus* 1.
- 38 *VH* 2.7. ff.
- 39 *VH* 2.15; *Icaromenippus* 27.
- 40 *VH* 2.19; 25f.
- 41 *VH* 2.19; *D. Mort.* 6.4ff.
- 42 *VH* 2.12; 14.
- 43 *Il.* 18.417–421.
- 44 *VH* 2.35.



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Part IV

Consumers of fantasy



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15 Narrators and audiences for Fantasy

Who tells fantastic material to whom, and under what circumstances? It is worth looking at the contexts of fantasy as we find them across the many accounts we have drawn on. A useful starting point is the setting of Odysseus' narratives to the Phaeacians at the court of King Alcinous. Halfway through his guest's narration of his adventure in the land of the Dead, Alcinous himself encourages the storyteller:¹

Odysseus, when we look at you we do not think you are like a deceiver or a thief, such as the dark earth nourishes in quantity, wide-wandering men who invent false tales, from which a man would learn nothing. But you shape your words, and they are full of sense. You have told your tales like a skilful bard, the dire woes of all the Argives and you yourself.

It is clear that the listener is meant to believe the amazing tales of the Cyclops, Circe and the rest; accordingly, the Phaeacians can acquire a reputation for gullibility in later authors.²

Two other echelons of popular storytellers we might identify, one going through all classes and the other considerably more elite. The first would cover those concerned with sacred (and not so sacred) sites: tour guides and temple staff, who might be called on to relate the local wonders or explain the local monuments relating to them.³ The word *arētalogus* (miracle-monger) would obviously be appropriate here, though the technical word is usually (in Greek) *periēgētēs* (guide) or *exēgētēs* (interpreter).⁴ It is usually in fictional contexts that these storytellings are most readily commemorated. Perhaps the best example is in Plato's *Timaeus*, where we have recollections of Solon's reminiscences of an Egyptian priest's account of the ancient tale of Athens and Atlantis.⁵

In what is clearly an imitation of this setting, we find Dio of Prusa rehearsing an account of the Trojan War that he claims to have obtained himself from an Egyptian priest of Onouphis, drawn partly from now-destroyed inscriptions and other Egyptian records;⁶ such stories are obviously implied in a number of 'priestly enquiries' in Herodotus and elsewhere, and indeed the plot of Heliodorus' large-scale novel the *Aethiopica* revolves round the tale told by the Egyptian priest

Calasiris, usefully accompanied by a kind of commentary on his own storytelling mannerisms and mendacities.⁷

At a much lower level, we can place the garrulity of tourist guides as storytellers. Plutarch (*Mor.* 400f.) notes the barbecue spits dedicated by a courtesan; as Herodotus attributes such a dedication to Rhodopis, the chances are that the Cinderella-type story she represents would have been told in guided tours of Delphi.⁸ Remains and myths attached to sites obviously had the potential for narrative. Pausanias comments that Geryon's remains were exhibited at a small town site in Asia Minor, despite the prevailing tradition of his connexion with Cadiz; Argos similarly claimed the Palladium from Troy (Pausanias favours Aeneas' taking it to Italy).⁹ Lucian in particular attributes fabulous tales to tour guides (*Philops.* 4); gullible proponents could relay such accounts for themselves. The Elder Pliny quotes C. Licinius Minucianus, governor of Syria in 68 CE, on a spring of wine in a temple of Dionysus;¹⁰ a letter in a Lycian temple preserves a despatch purporting to be from a hero of the Trojan War; long lives are reported for the people of Tmolus in Asia Minor of up to 150 years; or an elephant read Greek and could allegedly write 'I myself wrote this'.¹¹

Wonder narrative as diversion

At the highest public level, we find the rhetoricians' practice of warming up an audience on any occasion at which a formal speech was required. We have a number of *prolaliae* told by Lucian, among others, and it is useful to review the kind of contents we might expect. One example mentions Herodotus as having given public readings of his work at the Olympic Games to a packed audience in the chamber of the temple (*Herodotus sive Aetion* 1); given the often anecdotal content of the work, this naturally involves storytelling, though Lucian is not specific as to what was read. Lucian himself claims to be telling two stories of his own (of Herodotus' recitation at Olympia and Aetion's painting) to a select audience in the chief city of Macedonia, including the most prestigious rhetors, historians and sophists; and he uses stories of Zeuxis painting centaurs and Antiochus using elephants in battle to parallel the effect of novelty on an audience. One notes Lucian's near contemporary Hadrian of Tyre's reputation (Philostratus *VS* 590) for telling magic tales (*terateuomenos*), to the extent of actually being thought a magician in his own right.

An 'Aesopic' fable usefully attests to the value of storytelling in public recitation:¹²

The orator Demades was once addressing the people of Athens, and since they paid little attention to his speech he asked for permission to tell them a fable of Aesop. On obtaining their consent he began: 'Demeter was travelling in company with a swallow and an eel; when they reached the bank of a river, the swallow flew up into the air and the eel plunged into the water'. At this point he stopped. 'Well', they asked, 'and what about Demeter?' 'She is

angry with you', he said, 'because you disregard affairs of state and are all ears for Aesop's Fables'.

The anecdote itself is suitably fantastic: a cautionary tale based on a nonsense beginning.

The transition to a culture in which storytelling is normally conducted in the context of prose brings isolated allusions to professional storytellers of a different kind. The literate culture of classical Athens and its successors produces allusion to *gelōtopoioi* (laughter-makers), whose talents could presumably stretch beyond storytelling to mere jokes on the one side and to entertaining non-verbal antics on the other; we hear of a guild of 60 such (i.e. double 'The Thirty' Tyrants),¹³ but little more than that. The presence of court entertainers continues for Philip of Macedon and Alexander, and in two mentions in Suetonius of *arētalogoī* at Augustus' court and *fabulatores* who talk or read the *princeps* to sleep.¹⁴ The easy association of storytelling with low entertainment is well implied by Dio of Prusa's description of activities in a market-place, in which a storyteller is telling his story amid the activities of what we should regard as fairground entertainers.¹⁵

Symposiac storytelling

The great majority of storytellers and opportunities that we know of are not professional, and their activity covers a wide range of occasions. Most obvious is the dining and after-dinner conversations at a symposium or equivalent, whether the diners are highly educated or not. Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* offers a (Persian) symposium scene in which Cyrus and his officers come round to discussing the desirability or otherwise of light-hearted storytelling itself.¹⁶ The first tale is a clever and complex variant of 'the man who was cheated of a meal', of which simpler variants turn up both in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* and in *The Arabian Nights*, though here it seems a little awkwardly told as an example of bad table manners. This is followed by a 'parade-ground' joke about a silly platoon told to follow its leader and ending up escorting a messenger sent to fetch nothing more than a letter. A glum companion accuses the tellers of *alazoneia* and evidently prefers doleful stories to light-hearted ones.¹⁷ It is as if the first two officers act as unpaid *gelōtopoioi*.

We also find Bdelycleon in Aristophanes' *Wasps* instructing his father on how to tell elevating 'civic' stories about sporting or political feats rather than the crude fairy-tale fantasies that occur to the old man naturally.¹⁸ Fear of disapproval for telling the wrong story at dinner surfaces in Trimalchio's banquet, where the host's freedman friend Niceros is afraid that educated guests are going to laugh at him for his (actually well-told) werewolf story.¹⁹

The most useful example is perhaps not Plato's *Symposium*, to which storytelling is in a sense incidental, but Plutarch's *Banquet of the Seven Sages*, which contains a useful illustration of the variety of major types: wisdom problems (either as an anecdote²⁰ or a report²¹) or an episodic event (interpretation of a new-born 'centaur'),²² an Aesopic Fable delivered by Aesop in person;²³ discussion of

riddles of Eumetis;²⁴ a fable of fox and leopard;²⁵ and even mention of Aesop's dog.²⁶ Often here there is a popular nuance, for which some measure of apology is implied:²⁷

Cleobulus said 'the law has provided measure for wise people; but for the less well educated I will tell a story told by my daughter, who told it to her brother. For she said that the moon asked her mother how she might weave herself a tunic to fit her'.

Gorgus then reports the tale of Arion and the dolphin as actually in the process of happening;²⁸ there is then the story of Hesiod's burial (another 'murder will out' story),²⁹ and a historical exemplum of Cypselus.³⁰

The ghost stories of Niceros and Trimalchio in Petronius offer a linked pair of 'associative' contributions, one leading to the other, and still greater performer's aplomb is shown by the expansive, theatrical way Thelyphron tells his supernatural story at Byrrhaena's banquet in Apuleius.³¹ We note, too, a steady trickle of storytelling in the phenomenal memories of Athenaeus' diners, some at least not explained by the eagerness for deipnosophistic pedantry (e.g. in the story of the half-seas-over symposium). Other varieties of story are possible. In Lucian's *Symposium*, the doctor Dionicus tells a story from his immediate past experience, corresponding to our 'A funny thing happened to me on my way here', on how he disarmed a madman by forcing him to play the flute;³² and parasites might obviously tell their characteristic *geloia* in narrative form.

Other pretexts for tales

Outside the symposium itself, we can note the setting of a journey, or a delay in one. The tale-length wishes in Lucian's *Navigium* are intended to while away the time during a walk from the Piraeus to Athens³³ (in this case Lucian's *Navigium* offers a dual purpose: not just to pass the time, but to test each teller's moral character by the wishes he embodies in his account (*Navigium* 16 *ibid.*). The long ghoulish tale of Aristomenes and Socrates which opens Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*³⁴ similarly shortens the journey to Hypata.

A further obvious occasion is to combat the boredom of long repetitive work: the Minyades in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 4.36ff. decide to divert themselves from their task in just such a manner:

One of them, drawing the thread deftly with her thumb, said 'while the others waste time and crowd these false rites, we too whom Pallas, a more powerful goddess, holds back—let us lighten the useful work of our hands with a variety of tales and in turn let us bring to our idle ears something which will not let the time seem too long'. The sisters approved of her words and told her to start. She thought which to tell out of many (for she knew a great many). She was in two minds about telling of Babylonian

Dercetis, whom they say the people of Babylon believe to have changed to a fish, covered in scales, or rather how her daughter took on feathers and spent her last years in high towers, or how a certain nymph by incantation or too potent spells might turn the bodies of young boys to dumb fishes until she herself suffered the same fate, or how the tree which bore white berries now bears dark fruit after contact with blood. This one found favour, since the story is not a well-known one, following her thread as she began her tale in such measures.

The stories so presented are Pyramus and Thisbe, the Sun, Leucothoe and Clytie and Salmacis and Hermaphroditus.³⁵ Five others are passed by along the way: the punishment of Daphnis, as too well known; the sex-changing Sithon, Celmis, the Curetes, and Crocus and Smilax,³⁶ before Bacchus intervenes and changes the irreverent story-tellers into bats. We are left with the notion of a ready-made repertoire, as so often concentrating on *mirabilia*.

The audience

Aside from attested occasions, we should stress two complementary factors in our evidence for tellers and listeners alike: the sheer delight of storytelling—true or false—and likewise the receptivity of listeners, all agog in anticipation of rumour, hot news or surprise of some description. The beginning of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* sets the agenda, when Lucius, on overhearing accusations that an incredible tale is being told, immediately wants to hear it for himself.³⁷

And while I tried to listen, one of them let out a guffaw: 'Stop', he said, 'telling these absurd and gross falsehoods'. When I heard this I was thirsty for novelty: 'Instead', I said, 'share the tale with me. Not indeed that I am prying, but that I should like to know everything, or at least most things. At the same time the pleasant charm of stories will lighten the harshness of the hill we are climbing'.

The experience can be reinforced from, for example, the Platonic dialogue-frames: a character who has heard of an unusual event will put pressure on a friend he can expect to know more.³⁸ Plato makes a particular point of beginning with reports of an incident or encounter to a willing and excited listener, as when Crito asks Socrates about his meeting with the two strangers in town, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. In fact, this turns out to lead to a serious exposure of the two charlatans but is built up by Socrates' ironic reporting as a marvellous performance by someone of miraculous omniscience.³⁹

We may also encounter more negative presentations of storytellers and their performances. Especially notable is the false newsmonger at Theophrastus, *Characters* 8. This man is more than the mere stream-of-consciousness chatterer but is rather the skilled peddler of reporting clichés, evidently for the sake of it,

and he builds up a self-enhancing picture of the death of Cassander, decorated with boastful exaggerations:⁴⁰

On the road he is good at telling how he campaigned with Alexander, and how he got on, and how many jewel-encrusted cups he brought back ... and he mentions letters from Antipater, indeed three in a row, inviting him to Macedon.

The bore, who is in any case a popular target of satirical writing, may be presented as a storyteller, as in Terence *Eunuchus* 419ff., where Thraso threatens Gnatho with a tale he has ground out many times before.

Storytelling and children

A special category we ourselves take for granted is that of stories told to children. This was recognised in antiquity and singled out for especial dismissiveness in a culture whose intellectual forces were geared to the moral improvement of adults and were not particularly concerned with the stimulation of youthful imagination. Indeed, imaginative material of any kind is readily dismissed under such titles as *aniles fabulae* ('old wives' tales'), and in general, female storytellers, either old women or (often ill-educated) nurses, are credited with the initial instruction of children, not without the tacit disapproval of writers on education. Discussion beyond the level of the dismissive remark is exceptional and not ideally illuminating; one notes descriptions of mainly mythological paintings for a child by two of the Philostrati,⁴¹ and while the tone is certainly not patronising, it seems quite strongly didactic, often concerned to relate a painting to reading of Homer or other literary figures already imbibed. But there is a strong effort to hold the child's attention by presenting a scene as paradoxical or puzzling, before unravelling it by part-reciting the underlying story itself.

A second special category is the description of pictures as such, where the storyteller is usurping what we should now describe as a mixed-media experience. This was a separately dedicated exercise in the rhetorician's curriculum, broadened indeed under the title *ecphrasis* to take in descriptions of any kind. It calls for some technique of *enargeia*, of evoking a scene as if it were actually before the eyes of the audience, and the narrative background may be considerably compressed, but it is just as likely to involve straightforward narration of the subject-matter itself, with occasional allusion to aspects of its visual artistry. Indeed, whole novels could be and were narrated as *ecphraseis*, as in the case of both Longus and Achilles Tatius, with the story encapsulated in conversation arising out of seeing a picture on a related topic.

Wisdom and scholarly storytelling

As well as the purely entertaining aspect of storytelling, there is also the element of instruction or conveying of wisdom information largely inherent in the nature

of an oral tale. One persistent cliché that seems to survive from oral culture is the journey to a relatively exotic place, inaccessible region or the like to hear some ancient or timeless tale. The classic Homeric example is Menelaus' recollection of listening to Proteus when he is driven by storm to the Egyptian coast, ending with the prophetic tale of Menelaus' own journey to the Isles of the Blest.⁴² The Euboean oration of Dio of Prusa⁴³ provides a similar scenario closer to home, where a wise old peasant is made to tell an idyll of rustic subsistence and self-sufficiency outside the boundaries of conventional and corrupt urban society. A good deal more contrived is Dio's encounter with a middle-aged prophetess in the heat of the day in an inaccessible back-wood of the Peloponnese, to hear an aretalog of Heracles that can be related to Dio's own situation, as he is to relay it to the Emperor Trajan.⁴⁴ This in turn leads us to a tale-type in which the frame involves a king or nobleman listening to the wisdom of someone usually older and wiser. The classic setting was that of Midas and the satyr, whom the king intoxicates to capture, then listens to for 10 days; the long extract in a fragment of Theopompus gives us the tale of a geographical fantasy and fantastic ageing process among the inhabitants of another continent.⁴⁵

In spite of the strongly oral emphasis of so much storytelling, professional and amateur alike, there is also a substantial written repertoire as well. Collections of tales occur for a variety of reasons, and a number have already been touched upon wherein we can see that the association of stories on related or similar themes will be brought together. We need only note the course of the conversation in, for example, Lucian's *Philopseudeis*, wherein a ghost story by one speaker will jog the memory of the next in turn; or once more individual speakers will compete, at least implicitly, over who is able to produce the best story, or the most exaggerated. Sometimes indeed there will be an initial proposal of a single topic of conversation to which every speaker will contribute, as in the case of Plato's *Symposium*. It is not too far from this idea to mere catalogues of stories: the *Moralia* of Plutarch contain a high proportion of collected anecdote material or instances, sometimes simply assembled as 'Tales of Virtuous Women', or 'Love Stories' or 'Spartan sayings' (many in anecdotal form), or moral treatises supported by a large proportion of narrative illustration. Sometimes, such tales will serve a purpose specific to the author himself, as when Parthenius' *Erōtica Pathēmata* claims to have collected raw materials to be versified by someone else. In other cases, we are likely to be looking at materials collected for the motive of local antiquarianism, in others still for what might be more salacious motives, as in the *Milēsiaka* of Aristides of Miletus, whether these were tales actually heard, or claimed as such, *in situ* in Miletus by the author.

Besides monothematic collections, we shall encounter others wherein it is clear that the author is acting as a miscellanist who wishes to collect materials for the opposite reason: to achieve a pleasurable variety. These compilations are likely to be offered to readers for a mixture of pleasure and instruction and consist of ensembles which may include materials other than pure storytelling. Aulus Gellius' *Attic Nights*, Aelian's *Varia Historia* and the *Stromateis* of Clement of Alexandria offer good examples of the contents; the *Florida* of Apuleius are

more specifically a collection of the author's own usually introductory pieces. Marvellous storytelling looms large throughout such literature, though often shrunk to the level of exempla, mere instances of moralising illustration.

It will be clear that storytelling is not always easy to characterise. The close connexion between oral storytelling and everyday experience makes it difficult to predict. And some categories will naturally overlap: it may be difficult to separate travellers' tales from journeys to the other world, or didactic stories based on experience; all three might easily converge. The setting of a story may do much to change our perception of it. This is usefully illustrated by four major settings of the 'Choice of Heracles' theme that constitutes the so-called *Allegory of Prodicus*. The story itself is simple enough: Heracles is confronted by two allegorical women, Virtue and Vice, and after listening to their respective persuasions, chooses the former. We first encounter a report of it as told by Prodicus, evidently as a prestigious *epideixis* to large and appreciative audiences and apparently decked out with a great deal of rhetorical ornamentation. Our first actual surviving text, however, is the report by Xenophon in his *Memorabilia* of Socrates, with the master himself offering what purports to be a humble paraphrase of the sophist's version, though again with considerable elaboration of the two women's parts, but now in the context of philosophical discussion and cautionary tale.⁴⁶ We encounter it in its most elaborate form attributed to a wise woman as an oral story listened to by Dio of Prusa on his wanderings, but this time so elaborate as to be clearly at odds with its simple setting, and indeed reshaped in the direction of Imperial panegyric, with another allegory superimposed: Trajan is implied as the recipient, as a second Heracles; and not Virtue and Vice but Rulership and Tyranny are now the opposing pair.⁴⁷ There is in this case elaborate description of the setting as two mountain-peaks, and Tyranny in particular has acquired horrific and paradoxical behaviour, with a mountain retreat littered with corpses and strewn with misused and ill-assorted wealth. And lastly with Lucian, we return to sophistic *epideixis*, but with a childhood experience of the author himself now claimed as the setting in a rhetorical introduction, with the competition this time between Sculpture and *Paideia*. The four examples give us a round trip from rhetoric to philosophy and back to rhetoric once more, and in the latter case, to a rare example of a children's story; none of the versions presents the simple wisdom tale as which the story presumably started out. We can see some of the reasons for the attraction and indeed resilience of the narrative: its simplicity, versatility and capacity for almost routine descriptive elaboration.

Two fantastic settings

It is useful to end with two scenes wherein the storytellers and their audiences are entirely fictitious, as a reminder that imaginative authors will transport a storyteller's repertoire into narrative situations. We come near the very essence of fantastic storytelling in the scenario of Virgil's *Sixth Eclogue*. When Silenus is helplessly drunk in the middle of the day, shepherds and a nymph bind him with garlands and refuse to release him until he offers an exhibition of storytelling.

The resulting cascade is an eccentric cross-section through traditional mythology, with emphasis at times on the grotesque, but it serves as a reminder of the kind of mythology of which satyrs tend to be most readily aware, a mythology which can be equated in some sense, at least, with ancient wisdom. Or we can go full circle back to Homer by witnessing Lucian's tales of the stories actually current in the Isle of the Blessed itself.⁴⁸ The heroes can still go into action, with Homer still on hand to celebrate their achievements:

Scarcely had the games concluded when word came that the people being punished in the place for the wicked had broken their bonds, overcome their guards and were on the way to the island: they were led by Phalaris of Acragas ... When Rhadamanthus heard, he ranged the heroes on the shore ... Achilles made the greatest contribution, but Socrates too performed conspicuously on the right wing, much better than when he fought at Delium when alive ... Homer wrote an account of this battle too, and as I departed he gave me the books to carry back to the people in our world; but later we lost these too along with everything else. The poem began like this:

'Now sing me, Muse, the shades of the heroes in battle ...'

Conclusions

We are able, then, to note the variety of situations that will trigger fantastic accounts: the tellers and listeners alike may be of any social class or occupation; entertainment, relief of boredom or sophisticated instruction may all be part of the mix; and overall we can expect a sense of wonder to prevail. Well might Lucian note the spring in India where aged reciters who have imbibed a year ago amazingly resume their narrative exactly where they had left off!⁴⁹

Notes

- 1 *Odyssey* 11.363–369.
- 2 E.g. Lucian, *Verae Historiae* 1.3.
- 3 For their activities, Casson (1974), 229–291 passim.
- 4 For the *arētaologos*, Scobie (1969), 24–27.
- 5 Plato, *Timaeus* 21E–25D.
- 6 Dio, *Troicus*, *Or.* 11, 37f.
- 7 *Aethiopica* 2.21–7.11 (Calasiris' story: 2.24–5.33).
- 8 *Moralia* 400F. For Rhodopis and Cinderella, Anderson (London 2000), 24–42.
- 9 Pausanias 1.35.7f. (Geryon); 2. 23.5f. (Palladium).
- 10 Spring of wine, Pliny *NH* 31.16: we are reminded of the Dionysiac river of wine in Lucian, *VH* 1.7.
- 11 Trojan War despatch, Pliny *NH* 13.88; Long lives at Tmolus, Pliny 7.159; Literate elephant, Pliny *NH* 8.6.
- 12 Perry (1965), 63.
- 13 The Sixty: Athenaeus 614DE.
- 14 Suetonius *Augustus* 78, 74.
- 15 Dio *Or.* 20.10.
- 16 *Cyrop.* 2.2.2–5.

- 17 *Cyrop.* 2.2.11; 2.2.15.
- 18 *Wasps* 1174–1196.
- 19 *Satyrice* 61.3f.
- 20 *Moralia* 146F.
- 21 Stopping the rivers 151B–D, cf. 152E–153E.
- 22 *Mor.* 149C–E.
- 23 *Mor.* 150A.
- 24 *Mor.* 154BC (A ‘clever girl’ story?).
- 25 *Mor.* 155B.
- 26 *Mor.* 156A, 157B.
- 27 *Mor.* 175A.
- 28 *Mor.* 160E–162B. For other variants of this story, Anderson (2003), 108–112.
- 29 Cf. *Mor.* 984E (longer version: Athenaeus 466C, of Enalys).
- 30 *Mor.* 163F–164A.
- 31 *Satyrice* 61.6–63.10; Apuleius, *Met.* 2.21–30.
- 32 Lucian, *Symp.* 20.
- 33 *Navigium* 16ff.
- 34 Apuleius *Met.* 1.5–20.
- 35 *Met.* 4.55–270; 285–388.
- 36 *Met.* 4.276–284.
- 37 Apuleius *Met.* 1.2f.
- 38 E.g. *Symp.* 172A–173E.
- 39 Plato, *Euthydemus* 271A–304E.
- 40 Theophrastus, *Characters* 23.
- 41 Ed. Fairbanks, *LCL* (1931); Kalinka-Schönberger, (1968), the latter dealing only with the senior of the two.
- 42 *Odyssey* 4.351–570.
- 43 *Or.* 7.10–63; commentary by D.A. Russell (1992).
- 44 *Or.* 1.50–84.
- 45 Quoted by Aelian, *Varia Historia* 3.18. See c. 4.
- 46 Xen. *Memorabilia* 2.1.21–34.
- 47 *Or.* 1.49–84.
- 48 Lucian, *Verae Historiae* 2.23f.
- 49 Lucian, *Dionysus* 7.

16 Some approaches, ancient and modern

It is time to suggest some sort of synthesis of the resources and situations which the reader of ancient fantasy might expect, and it is further useful to do so on the basis of the examples collected *before* we look at what students of fantasy ancient and modern have been able to make of it all. We should not lay down any absolute requirements, as it is in the nature of fantasy to be able to elude or circumvent them. It is rather in the nature of the fantastic that we should say instead: 'we should not be surprised to find' a fantasy-text entailing some sort of channel of communication (e.g. a tall story); a 'normal' human narrator, witness, or reporter who testifies to an impossible journey to other worlds, to Utopian communities, to altered states of language or consciousness; dialogue with talking animals, or ghosts or gods or the dead; or the experience of extraordinary reversal of roles, extending even to metamorphoses of gender or species. Our observer may choose to comment on the extraordinary or supernatural nature of experiences, and indeed to query their reality or authenticity, or they may take them for granted as if they were absolutely normal. There may or may not be a return to 'normality'; there may or may not be a moral or satirical point. The whole ensemble may engender whimsical humour or horror or indeed both; it may appear to exist in any genre or be identifiable as having or being a genre in its own right.

Such a formulation is deliberately ponderous and inclusive; it is about as permissive and flexible as we might wish. Its length and number of alternative formulations make it almost defensively so; no doubt it would and should be capable of modification in the light of future developments; it is also capable of more than a little compression. It may be instructive to trace several of our materials through the suggested definition. Odysseus' accounts up to his arrival in Ithaca would fulfil more than half the categories suggested in the foregoing chapters; Aristophanes' *Birds* and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* would be able to fulfil just about all of them.

From endeavouring to define fantasy, we might move with Todorov to asking *why* fantasy should exist in the first place.¹ The answer might be 'to transcend normal human experience', or it might be no more grandiose than 'to provide whimsical amusement'. We might also, with Kathryn Hume, ask *how*.² It has to be said that literature on modern fantastic writing tends on the whole to pay token acknowledgement to a few ancient classics and leave it at that; in the indexes of

Hume, Swinfen, Rabkin and others, one finds occasional allusion to the *Odyssey*, to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, to Petronius or to Lucian's *Verae Historiae*, and that is all too often just about as far as it goes. The chimaera of deciding whether fantasy is best classified as a genre in its own right has tended to distract attention from the study of examples to a kind of protracted series of genre wars.³ It does not require a great deal of critical acumen to concede that a little fantasy can be made to go a long way; it only takes one 'sorcerer's apprentice' moment to turn Apuleius' Lucius into an ass with the mind of a man,⁴ and then the real world can be relied upon to work out the consequences. Or we can readily acknowledge that Petronius can allow the real and the surreal to work together in an unpredictable partnership throughout the fragments of the *Satyricon*.

It seems on the whole misguided to try to establish the limits of the fantastic, or indeed to delimit too precisely the boundaries between fantastic material and the normal processes of imaginative fiction. It might be felt refreshing, therefore, that Bakhtin, who was a classicist by training, should indeed attempt to link fantasy ancient and modern, and moreover that he should use as a lynchpin the materials that he regards as 'Menippean';⁵ these are most obviously accessible through the surviving works of Lucian, readily established as one of the most resourceful practitioners of literary fantasy in the ancient world. One problem with all this is the wide sweep. Jackson exemplifies ancient Menippea as Petronius, Lucian's *True Histories*, Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* and (oddly) a specific satire by Varro (*Bimarcus*),⁶ but it is rather difficult to come up with a definition of what is 'Menippean'⁷ on the basis of this cross-section, though we might readily concede that all four instances can be characterised in some measure as incorporating elements of the fantastic. To insist, as Bakhtin does, on 'the carnivalesque' fits *The Golden Ass* much better than the other three, but Apuleius himself not nearly as well as Old Comedy.

So far there has been relatively little interest other than on Bakhtin's part in the fantastic in the ancient world. Lucian's *Icaromenippus* rates a passing mention in Rabkin as a possible 'science fiction' text;⁸ *Verae Historiae* does not appear at all. Ominously, Aristotle makes the index, but not Aristophanes. Ovid manages to be included in the widest of the perspectives offered by Marina Warner.⁹ But in general, the examples drawn on in the present study are taken from parts of the ancient world that critics based in modern literature seldom reach: the *Life of Aesop*, the *Alexander Romance* or a papyrus featuring talking animals are not the first resort of those whose primary experience is of other eras. It is interesting to see the classifications offered by classicists themselves of the classic texts. Dover accords a chapter to fantasy in his general study of Aristophanic Old Comedy, but in fact only about half of it actually deals with the topic,¹⁰ and others tend to use the term equally if not even more sparingly. Lucian, the classic fantastic author in later antiquity, fares almost equally patchily; Rabkin's wide-ranging anthology contains three Ovidian metamorphoses and no Lucian at all; Georgiadou and Larmour noticeably tend to avoid the term *fantasy* in their critically aware commentary on *Verae Historiae*, whereas Bompaigne had no difficulty with the term in the late 1950s.¹¹ Often terms coined from imitators of

Lucian, such as 'Rabelaisian' or 'Munchausenesque' might be guaranteed to do the author at least as much justice, but only in a circular and question-begging sort of way.

Before taking leave of fantasy and imagination, it is worthwhile to ask ourselves how far the foregoing discussions can contribute to the modern critical debate on the nature of the fantastic in literature and vice versa. One's first assumption is that there is likely to be only limited common ground: a theoretical discussion that takes its starting-point from the repertoire of Gothic horror or twentieth-century debate on the definition and hierarchies of literary genres, for example, as Todorov's does, is not to be expected to intersect a great deal with the world of Old Comedy.¹² One might well start with the assumption that *Alice in Wonderland* and Calvino's *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* are products of cultures too far removed from the ancient world, and that it requires very different critical approaches. But one can be all too easily surprised at what can be found to survive somewhere or other. *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* represents a card game in which mute guests tell their tales by reading sequences of Tarot cards, each narrator being able for the purposes of his own tale to read the same card in a different way from his predecessor; the game invites a suitably 'postmodern' meditation on ambiguities of interpretation. But the process is already flourishing in ancient literature, when Herodotus has the Scythians and the Persians interpreting objects sent as a diplomatic message in two entirely opposite ways,¹³ or Aesop in the *Life of Aesop* catches out his master by assigning different values to the four alphabetic letters that accompany a discovered treasure—they can mean the equivalent of 'help yourself' or 'put it back'.¹⁴ Or the charlatan priests in *The Golden Ass* can interpret the same oracular verses differently for every client, depending on their personal circumstances.¹⁵ The game has been there all along, and its classification as an international tale-type will offer a good enough reason in itself; Calvino, for his part, was a transmitter of folktales in his own right, well qualified to be a 'Professor of Signs'.

Alice in Wonderland or *Through the Looking Glass* is another matter, and the classicist might indeed be hard put to point to ingenious logical games in a naïve and fantastic setting. Kathryn Hume quotes a passage wherein Alice is disconcerted when Tweedle Dum is able to suggest to her that she herself does not enjoy an objective existence.¹⁶ Once more, however, the ancient parallel is immediately to hand: Lucian has the would-be buyer of a Stoic 'life' amazed to find himself argued out of existence and back into it again by the ruthless false logic of Stoic fallacy.¹⁷ There is also of course a royal road from ancient to modern fantasy through Rabelais and Raspe, the creator of Baron Munchausen, both of whom knew their Lucian.

Ancient criticism

Now that we have been able to review a number of themes and groups of themes that can reasonably be termed *fantastic*, we can attempt to stand back from the subject and ask whether ancient criticism could throw much light on the material

in question, and whether the efforts of students of modern literature have anything to offer for the interpretation of fantasy in Antiquity.

In ancient literary criticism, there is a notable lack of discussion of fantasy as we understand it, at least as a separate category, and we have to be content to note incidental mention, as in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, where the first recognisable discussion occurs. We find Euripides complaining about pretentious and meaningless words in Aeschylus. Dionysus as judge—in the Underworld, let it be said—is able to acknowledge¹⁸

Yes, by the gods,
I've spent a long stretch of the night awake
Wondering what sort of bird the 'tawny cockhorse' is.

Aeschylus explains it as an emblem painted on ships. Euripides is quick to distance himself from writing about such things:¹⁹

Not tawny cockhorses, by Zeus, nor goat-stags, like you,
That they depict in Median tapestries,
But when I first inherited the art from you it was swollen with pretentious
and tedious words ...

It seems clear that among much else, Euripides is criticising the use of fantastic creatures and descriptions as such (in contrast to his own down-to-earth simplicity). Such a view would have been heavily reinforced by Plato, who makes Socrates²⁰ declare his impatience with centaurs, the chimaera, gorgons, pegasuses and the rest, which seem somehow irrelevant to the life of the man in the Athenian street. We find, too, that Trimalchio endorses the same sort of attitude, a Gradgrind approach before its time. This does not of course prevent Plato from appearing to invent his own myths and using them as vehicles for philosophical truth when he feels that argument itself runs out or requires reinforcement, but fantasy tends to be felt as the legitimate stuff of poets, and poets are banned from the Republic even when only their second-hand representations of reality are at stake.

Unfortunately we are not helped by the normal meaning of *phantasia* or *phantastikos* which consistently relates to the ability to form images and present them as if they are actually seen. This quality of 'visualisation' can of course apply to things which we should regard as fantastic, but it unfortunately includes the imagining of the purely mundane as well.²¹ There are however some telling formulations in 'Longinus':²²

when inspired by passionate enthusiasm, you seem to see what you put before
the very eyes of the audience.²³

The illustrations of *phantasia* noted in chapter one are telling:²⁴ Orestes confronted with the furies, or Helios instructing his son in driving the celestial chariot.²⁵ Further illustrations in Longinus confirm our suspicion, including Aeschylus on

the oath by Ares, by Enyo, by bloodthirsty Terror, as sworn by the champions against Thebes (15.5). Dionysiac possession of palace or mountain in Aeschylus or Euripides can be added in (15.5f.), as can Erinyes again (15.8); or perhaps bold-est of all, the battle of Chaeronea drawing up a decree (15.10). It is worth noting that in one case at least, *phantasia* aligns exactly with our own sense: a guest at Trimalchio's dinner describes the host as '*phantasia, non homo*' (Not a man but a dream, 38.15).

It is only almost incidentally in a bizarre hagiographic work that we stumble on treatments dealing with what we should safely call creative imagination as the centrepiece of discussion. In three passages of the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Philostratus of Athens gives us detailed discussion, most notably at 6.19; the discussion concerns how the Greeks were able to visualise their own gods as opposed to the theriomorphic concepts of the Ethiopians.²⁶

We should, however, note that the theoretical discussions are supplemented at a much more elementary level by the use of fantasy in the school exercise. The world of the *progymnasmata*, the preliminary exercises in rhetoric, entails the insertion of speeches into fables, the paraphrase of mythological situations and the like or the imaginative uses of such openings as 'What would Medea say when ...'. The rhetorical memoirs of the Elder Seneca preserve a number of fantastic elements in individual declamation exercises, and so, it has to be said, do writers of fantasy themselves: there is a very considerable amount of commentary scattered through the *parabaseis* of Aristophanes, and still more through the voluminous fantastic writing of Lucian. But ancient criticism can be responsible for some of the most questionable judgements. Longinus has no time for fantastic elements in the *Odyssey*:²⁷

Sometimes a great spirit when it loses its vigour drifts too easily into nonsense, as in the story of the wineskin, the sailors fed as swine by Circe ... and Zeus nourished by doves like a nestling, and Odysseus on his shipwreck without food for ten days—and the incredible episode of the slaughter of the suitors. For what would we call such things but the actual dreams of Zeus?

Modern theory²⁸

It is tempting to take a starting point from Todorov, writing of the fantastic in fiction.²⁹ He begins with Cazotte's story *Le Diable amoureux*, in which one Alvaro has been living for a month with a female creature whom he believes to be an evil spirit—the devil or one of his minions. But in some respects she seems to be human; she confesses to being a sylph. Alvaro thinks he may be dreaming and asks the limits of the possible, or impossible.

There is no doubt, in this author's view, that Todorov is right to regard the situation as fantastic. If it is not, then nothing is. And I should immediately be tempted to compare it, at least in general terms, with a fragmentary ghost story preserved in Phlegon of Tralles,³⁰ where a man has been living with some kind

of supernatural woman, who turns out in this case to be one who had previously died. The laws of nature have been suspended or violated and we are faced with an extraordinary event. What seems disappointing is Todorov's wish to limit the fantastic far too closely to this sort of situation.³¹

The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighbouring genre, the uncanny or the marvellous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by someone who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.

This seems to me to define the fantastic far too narrowly, or at the very least not to allow for semantic overlap between *marvellous*, *uncanny* and *fantastic*. It might very well suit a situation particularly at home in Gothic horror, but there is a great deal that will be left out. Cloudeuckootown does not enjoy any ambiguous status in *Birds*; it appears to exist because in Old Comedy, all things are possible. Does that disqualify it from being 'fantastic' as opposed to 'marvellous'? What this doctrine opens the door to is dependence on reader-reaction.³² But it is no less interesting to consider what Todorov thought fantasy was *not* (34ff.); among discarded definitions, he would place those that rely on the excitement of fear in the reader, or indeed even in the author; he seems on flimsier ground when he opposes definitions based on opposition to reality, (36) which would see off Rabkin's insistence on diametrical opposition to the same.³³

Critics since Todorov have set out to modify his perspective with reference to one or more of the alternative perspectives to his structuralism available in the later twentieth century, including those of psychoanalysis³⁴ (Jackson), to which Armitt adds feminism and post-modernism. Armitt, indeed, sets out to rethink some of the genre demarcations that are too often assumed in dealing with the fantastic. It is certainly refreshing to set out to escape the over-categorisation that threatens to stifle the whole debate. It is as if there is an almost Aristotelian determination to map and measure and worst of all regulate the very kind of literary creativity that fantasy seeks to provide. The moment someone invents Cloudeuckooland, there will be a swarm of confounded land-surveyors hell-bent on measuring it. One problem is that critics do not always respond critically to previous contributions; it is singularly depressing to see the contributions of Vladimir Propp and Bruno Bettelheim cited without any challenge or modification when the latter is seriously discredited in the field of fairy tale and the former at least open to substantial challenge.³⁵ It does not exactly help for critics to take sides on whether fantasy and the fantastic should be distinguished beyond their grammatical functions of noun and adjective, and confusion is worse confounded when both are put side by side with 'phantasy' (as a concept familiar to psychologists). Kathryn Hume has undertaken to present a series of diagrams of the attempts at exclusive definitions of fantasy that have proliferated prior to 1984, and which she sees as emanating from faulty assumptions about the nature

of literature itself³⁶ and subordinating fantasy to the concern with mimetic and hence realistic literature.³⁷

They assume that fantasy is a pure phenomenon, that a few clear rules will delimit it, and that the result will be a genre or a form that can be called fantasy. They frame their definitions in such a way as to exclude as many works as possible. What remains, for most of these critics, is a small corpus of texts, all fairly uniform in their uses of departure from consensus reality, and this small corpus is duly declared to be 'fantasy'—with little thought given to all the works that have departures from reality which somehow fail to fit the rules.

Hume's response is to adapt a very simple model from Abrams (1953) to cover every possible relationship between author, audience, the world of the work itself and those of the author and audience respectively.³⁸ This is useful, flexible and clearer than one might expect from a desire to cover every possible relationship that might be involved in the creation and reception of a fantasy text. She then goes on to evaluate single-element definitions. Vax despairs of general formulation and goes for subject-matter: werewolves; vampires; autonomously active body parts; personality troubles, especially the extravagantly sexual; the invisible; changes in causality, space and time; and human degeneration.³⁹ Attebery, however, looks back to W.R. Irwin overall ('overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility').⁴⁰

More reassuring is the range of materials anthologised by Eric Rabkin in his *Fantastic Worlds* of 1979. Rabkin is prepared to include examples drawn from myth, folktale and fairy tale, ghost stories, horror, science fiction, and what he terms *heroic fantasy*, as well as examples that he simply terms *fantasy* and *modern fantasy* as such.⁴¹ He also suggests a crude scale of 1–10 on which examples might be placed in respect of their balance of realism and fantasy. There are other ways of putting up barriers so that this or that is excluded, accidentally or on purpose. Rabkin, for example, cites a useful example of the violation of literary convention which will produce a fantastic effect: 'Once upon a time there was a beautiful princess who fell in love with a plumber called Sid'. The point being made is that the reader of fairy tales is conditioned right from the phrase 'Once upon a time' not to expect realistic intrusions into the tale from plumbers called Sid.⁴² We have no difficulty in acknowledging the element of fantasy here or even in acknowledging that the most fantastic element in the story so far is the realistically named plumber. But that should not authorise us to regard 'normal' fairy tales as less fantastic if they maintain make-believe in the normal way right up to the princess living happily ever after with a 'normal' fairy-tale prince. In his study *The Fantastic in Literature* (1976), Rabkin had already laid out a number of approaches, relating the fantastic to literature of escape (42–73).⁴³ One notes that escapism is actually explicit in such texts as Aristophanes' *Birds* or Lucian's *Icaromenippus*, where the central character is looking for an alternative society to that of humankind. In each of the ancient cases, the escapism seems prompted,

as in the modern examples, by some sort of boredom.⁴⁴ Rabkin also notes its relationship to the perspective of the reader.⁴⁵ One oddity is his insistence that characters in works of fantasy must be aware of reversals of normal rules and not accept them; this would have the nonsensical effect of admitting *Alice in Wonderland/Through the Looking Glass* and disqualifying Lucian's *Verae Historiae* ...⁴⁶

Rabkin has some useful insights, as when he suggests Prospero as the archetype of the mad scientist.⁴⁷ So, one might argue, is the Socrates of the *Clouds*. Other propositions are perhaps less helpful:⁴⁸ 'games/formulas/fictions create fantastic worlds that allowably offer diametric alternatives to perceived reality'. There is a striving time and again for some kind of theory of everything that will make sense of every possible gradation of fantasy that appears in any work of fiction, and to out-Aristotle Aristotle himself in the systematisation of art. Some of the modern examples, too, prompt reference to ancient ones familiar to classicists. Several times, he returns to the idea of talking flowers in *Alice in Wonderland*, and one thinks of the whole web of references that leads to the talking trees in *Verae Historiae*: 'most of them spoke in Greek, some of them in Indian' ... in Lucian's world, their conversation is amorous, and its consequences fatal ...

Rabkin has interesting points also on perspective: 'we will not abandon perspectives entirely. Instead, we can only exchange particular perspectives for alternative ones, usually alternatives that are felt to be diametrical oppositions'. Our ancient fantasies have several useful examples: both in *Charon* and *Icaromenippus*, Lucian makes great play of (magically) changing perspective so that Charon can see all over the earth from a mountain-top, or that Menippus can see the earth from the moon in precise detail.⁴⁹ We should note, too, the point in the *Clouds* when Strepsiades is shown a map of Greece, never having seen a map before, and goes into a panic because Sparta is so close to Athens ...⁵⁰

Rabkin notes uncanny games with perspective, such as fictional characters who discuss their own fictionality (224). We certainly have something of the kind on a grand scale when in Lucian's *Juppiter Tragoedus*, Zeus is extremely concerned over the outcome of a debate between a Stoic and an Epicurean, the latter arguing in the full hearing of the gods themselves that gods either do not exist or do not contribute to human life in a helpful way.⁵¹ Lucian does not carry the absurdity through to the bitter end by having Zeus say 'but we know we exist ... or do we?' but the reader is able to make such a final link. There is similar absurdity when gods make assertions based only on what human authors themselves have imaginatively or poetically asserted; a marble or flesh-and-blood Aphrodite can still claim to be golden, because Homer calls her 'Golden Aphrodite'.

In dealing with the fairy tale as fantasy, Rabkin unfortunately accepts the analytical techniques of Vladimir Propp (55), though he does well to suggest that 'once upon a time' beginnings trigger very predictable forward expectations, while also noting that the nature of the world one escapes to tells something about oneself;⁵² Lucian's Isle of the Blest is a Utopia without Stoics.

Rabkin finally attempts to discuss the overall scope of fantasy.⁵³ Emphasis is laid on 'diametric reversal', be it in science, poetry, politics or theology as well as narrative, which will generate the fantastic (189).⁵⁴ We could reasonably claim

that Old Comedy does all of these as a matter of course; by making Socrates a scientist, preferring Aeschylus to Euripides, a sausage-seller to Cleon, or birds to gods, fantasy promotes topsy-turvydom and stands the accepted ('real') world on its head.

Few modern analyses of the fantastic deal in any detail with the repertoire available in antiquity, though they might allude to it occasionally by way of illustration. Nonetheless, parallels are easy enough to establish. Rabkin begins his discussion with allusion to the idea of talking plants, as illustrated in *Through the Looking Glass*; one only has to think of Lucian's *Verae Historiae*, where vinewomen talk in both Greek and 'Indian'. Rabkin emphasises, with a certain *lourdeur*, the necessity for a set of 'ground rules' the violation of which in varying degrees will produce corresponding approaches to the fantastic, and further emphasises the importance of (preferably) clearly established perspective.

Some approaches to Lucian's *Verae Historiae*

If most modern students of fantasy have more or less by-passed Lucian's *Verae Historiae*, one recent treatment, Karen ní Mheallaigh's *Reading Fiction with Lucian* (2014), has undertaken the task of making it central to theories of mimesis and reader-relationships. In particular, ní Mheallaigh is concerned with the passage in 1.26 where Lucian examines a moon-mirror:

And indeed I saw yet another marvel in the royal quarters: there is a huge mirror above a shallow well. If anyone goes down into the well, he hears all that is being said in our world on the earth, and if he looks into the mirror, he sees all the cities and people as if standing over them. At that point I saw my own family and all my home country; but whether they also saw me I cannot go further and say for certain. Whoever does not believe this is the case, if some time he too arrives there he will know that I am telling the truth.

ní Mheallaigh (216–227) adduces an impressive range of passages from the ancient philosophical repertoire and suggests (223)

This catoptric inversion of reality and fiction in *True <Hi>stories* is also embedded within a rich hinterland of quasi-philosophical contemplations of the mirror's problematic relation to reality in contemporary literature. In the ocularcentric culture of the imperial era, the mirror had become an object of peculiar scientific and philosophical fascination.

We can, however, approach the passage from another, simpler direction. Lucian has an interest in bizarre communications between the earth and on high; in *Icaromenippus*, Menippus uses sympathetic magic to gain the sharp-sightedness of an eagle from as far away as the moon, and so see in detail what is going on on earth, while Zeus hears the prayers from the world below by means of a well-opening in heaven.⁵⁵ Similarly in *Charon*, the ferryman is given magical sight by

means of a Homeric formula.⁵⁶ All Lucian has to do is ring the changes, inventing here a quasi-scientific instrument for good measure.

Again, ní Mheallaigh takes another route,⁵⁷ comparing the approach of *Verae Historiae* to that of Umberto Eco's *Travels in Hyperreality* (1975), where originals can be seen to be 'improved upon' by modern reconstruction, as in a Venus de Milo with two arms in Las Vegas. We now at least have the opportunity to have Homer interviewed by Lucian himself, and not through one of his pseudonyms either. But it is difficult to determine what exactly comparison with Eco can add; there is nothing particularly kitschy about Lucian's presentation. For 'Hyperreality' we might rather read 'elegant whimsicality'.

We might wonder to what extent theorising about the nature of the fantastic really helps us to come to terms with the ancient repertoire at our disposal. One suspects that writers of Athenian Old Comedy wrote their plays without any thought for a conceptual framework, (as opposed to a financial one), and that a poet like Ovid needed no more incentive to write than a convention to subvert. But that is not to discourage some latter-day Aristotle from finding a formula for a theory of everything in the future. When such a formula is found, it will be the responsibility of all future writers on fantasy from that point on to require it to be re-written once more.

Notes

- 1 Todorov (1973), 158.
- 2 Hume (1984), 55–143.
- 3 E.g. Rabkin 1979, 169–173 (in favour of a genre; against, e.g. Armitt (1996), 18.
- 4 Apuleius *Met.* 3.24.
- 5 Bakhtin (1965, English tr. 1984), 69f., linking Menippus and Lucian to Rabelais.
- 6 Jackson (1981), 14.
- 7 For problems of definition, Relihan (1993), 12–36.
- 8 Rabkin (1976), 119.
- 9 Warner (2002), 1–17.
- 10 Dover (1972), 30–48.
- 11 Bompaigne (1958), 657–705.
- 12 Todorov (1973), 41–57 (Gothic horror); 3–23 (hierarchy of genre, in relation to Northrop Frye).
- 13 Herodotus 4.131f. (with S. West, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 108 (1988), 207–211).
- 14 *Life of Aesop* 78–80.
- 15 Apuleius *Met.* 9.8.
- 16 Hume (1984), 127f.
- 17 Lucian, *Vitarum Auctio* 25.
- 18 *Frogs* 930ff.
- 19 *Frogs* 937–40.
- 20 *Phaedrus* 229Df.
- 21 For the scope of *phantasia* through Antiquity, G. Watson (1988).
- 22 Longinus 15.1f.
- 23 Longinus 15.1.
- 24 *Orestes* 255ff.
- 25 Euripides *Phaethon* fr. 779 Nauck.
- 26 *VA* 6.19. The theriomorphic gods should be Egyptian rather than Ethiopian.

- 27 Longinus 9.14.
- 28 Useful synthesis (from the perspective of classical reception) in Rogers and Stevens (2017).
- 29 Todorov (1973), 24.
- 30 Phlegon *Peri Thaumasiōn* 1.
- 31 Todorov (1973), 25.
- 32 Todorov 33, cf. Hume (1984), 14.
- 33 Rabkin (1976), 41.
- 34 Jackson (1981), 61–91.
- 35 E.g. by Todorov (1975), 5f. Armitt (1996), 19–25 usefully exposes the problems posed by Propp.
- 36 Hume (1984), 8–28.
- 37 Hume (1984), 8.
- 38 Hume (1984), 9f.
- 39 Vax (1960), c. 1.
- 40 Atteberry (1980), 1.
- 41 Rabkin (1979), xiii–xvii.
- 42 Rabkin (1979), 20.
- 43 Rabkin (1976), 42–73.
- 44 Rabkin (1976), 42f.
- 45 Rabkin (1976), 74–116.
- 46 Cf. Hume (1984), 13.
- 47 Rabkin 209.
- 48 Rabkin 211.
- 49 *Charon* 7; *Icaromenippus* 15.
- 50 Aristophanes *Clouds* 206–216.
- 51 Rabkin 224; Lucian, *Iuppiter Tragoedus* 33–53.
- 52 Rabkin 57; 73.
- 53 Rabkin 189–227.
- 54 Rabkin (1976), 189.
- 55 *Icaromenippus* 15f.; 25.
- 56 *Charon* 7.
- 57 ní Mheallaigh (2014), 232–240.

17 Conclusions

The man in the Greek or Roman street might be thought of as having little to do with fantasy, yet the more we reflect on it, the more difficult it is to avoid the fantastic in the course of everyday experience. Walk along a major road and the tombstone inscriptions will urge the passer-by to stop and read the lives of the eloquent dead. At least some species of bird like the parrot will apparently be heard to mimic human speech, and any number of species in the animal world will show evidence of social organisation so memorably evoked by the bees in Virgil's *Georgic* IV. If our observer travels abroad, there will be sights of wonder all round the fringe of the known world; journeys to Egypt or India will at least produce the hearsay of unusual peoples or still more exotic creatures. The further away these tend to be, the easier it will be to envisage the disintegration of civilisation with cannibal feasts or child sacrifice. What cannot actually be verified by sight or constructed in a cloud-formation can at least be dreamt without let or hindrance. Indeed, cloud-formations can transform themselves and give credence to metamorphosis, as can the observation of a tadpole that changes into a frog. So basic a social institution as a meal may invite novelty to the point of anarchy: small wonder that Trimalchio is described as *phantasia, non homo*.¹ Again, the practice of sex will attract the worship of Priapus as readily as Cupid or Aphrodite. There will be time-warps through which to view the distant memory of the Trojan War, whether our informant be Odysseus or Homer himself, and it will make a difference if our observer hears of events through an oral poet's verse or a sophist's prose. Audiences are of course available to lighten a journey, a menial task or a social gathering. So what can we make of it all?

It may be useful to sum up what has seemed to me to be new in each individual chapter as regards our view of fantasy. In the first instance, it seems that it can exist as a useful categorisation in its own right and that at least at times the term *fantasy* itself may be more helpful than mere literary genre-labelling to characterise imaginative effort in literature.

It is clear from the range of introductory examples that we could be confident of finding examples of fantasy in every period of Greek and Latin literature, from Homer through to Late Antiquity, and that not all reactions to it are necessarily favourable. Some writers, however, may wish to have it both

ways: Horace can reject fantastic creatures or on-stage metamorphosis yet still imagine his own droll figure experiencing aerial flight and metamorphosis in its own right.

The boundary between the living and the dead, impassable in fact, is one of the most frequent sources of fantasy in antiquity. Sepulchral epigrams apart, the rhetorical figure *eidōlopoiia* can enable the dead to speak to the living in a climate where the normal rules of biology are suspended. In the hands of Lucian, a whole sub-genre of miniature *Dialogues of the Dead* can be seen to emerge.

Nor is it only the dead who have a continuing voice. The world of the voiceless, in particular animals, is provided with a channel of communication as well; they enjoy a still more varied nature than in the natural world itself, given the variety of traditional mythical monsters available for heroes to slay by whatever means. Yet there are curious limits: Odysseus may talk to a crewman who prefers to remain a pig, but we do not find any dialogue between any hero and the chimaera or the minotaur, at any rate in extant literature. Nonetheless, the *Batrachomyiommachia* establishes a sub-genre of mock beast-epic of which we may have only a little surviving; the recent papyrus about the mouse Trixos reminds us that there may once have been much more. There is a flourishing industry of travel-narrative, by which it is possible to reach both men and animals that fall outside the natural world; the result is the discovery of new communities on the edge of or beyond the known, whether in time or place. What may have begun as anthropological observation need not take long to turn into entertaining parades of wonders. From Scheria to Cloudeuckooland to Atlantis, we do not need to look too far to find alternative societies, though in a good many cases, we might simply find ourselves looking at a typical Greek *polis* effortlessly transplanted to an improbable location. The societies of the Phaeacians and the Cyclopes lay a preliminary foundation; with the conquests of Alexander, the wonders of India can take over as a springboard for the imagination.

There is also a medium, that of the dream, whether normal or in the form of a day-dream, through which we can reach other worlds or distorted reality. An island or cave of dreams simply needs to be transplanted to the edge of the known world and decorated with 'normal' features, or a day-dreamer may fantasise that he acquires by magic the power of Providence itself. And close to such may lurk the domains of extreme horror, apparition or nightmare, where extremes of rhetorical effect are free to take their course.

The world of fantasy is reinforced in antiquity by myth, where impossible or highly unlikely events are ascribed to a usually distant past, in which they can be safely contained. Myths that have become standardised can be turned upside down by the application of fantasy. Myth includes the phenomenon of metamorphosis through which humans most often, but also other forms, animate or inanimate, can alter their shapes or have them altered. The notion of a fresh start after extreme inhumanity may trigger a metamorphosis; so too may some kinds of misunderstood science. Empedocles and others may raise questions about the random assemblages of limbs; once more such questions offer new opportunities for fantasy itself.

Fantasy may also encompass spheres as diverse as dining and sexual experience. Dinners may attain to fantastic dimensions either through sheer bulk or immoderate behaviour, not least on the part of an over-enthusiastic host; excessive drinking can even culminate in the illusion of shipwreck. Sexual fantasy may occur through the anarchic re-ordering of normal relationships, as when women are put in charge; even if rule by women is technically possible, it is still, outside Old Comedy, next to inconceivable. Fantasy can also take the form of literal re-designing of sexual anatomy itself. Plato's Aristophanes can be made to extemporise a myth of three-gender relationships, or Lucian's Selenites can experience change of sexual function in the natural(!) course of events, to say nothing of men grown from penis-plants; variations in the traditionally obscene *Priapeia* tend to be tame and limited by comparison.

When we look across all these categories, we can accept that some situations are naturally fantastic. We do not need Aristophanes to point out that clouds can indeed take on a sequence of different but vaguely recognisable shapes, nor do we need Lucretius or Ausonius to offer the stuff of dreams or nightmares, and it may take only a modest initial effort of the imagination to trigger off a life-changing metamorphosis: it takes only a single sorcerer's apprentice moment to trap Apuleius' Lucius in the body of an ass.

The role of key texts

Apart from thematic subject-matter, we are able to consider several examples of fantasy in specific texts. We have been able to look at the nature of the audience for receiving fantastic material, and the potentially divergent nature of fantasy in verse and prose, or the invention of both the history and prehistory of the Trojan War through authors at either end of antiquity. We have also looked at examples of individual authors—Aristophanes and Lucian, or Lucian and Seneca, converge over the handling of fantastic material—and we have ended with Lucian's fantasy *Verae Historiae*, which might be seen to represent a summation and celebration of fantasy.

Some texts serve as authoritative guides to the fantastic. Pride of place must go to the *Odyssey*: at the very outset of Greek literature, we find within a single text tales of cannibalism or carnivorous monsters, tales of magical metamorphoses, be it of Proteus or of Circe's victims, or even a device for trapping adulterous gods. We have a voyage narrative which takes in the fairy-tale kingdom of the Phaeacians with its paradise features, and a compressed ethnography of the Cyclopes and their community or lack of it. We also find already a first use of communications between the living and the world of the dead. We can reasonably claim that Odysseus' adventures as told to the Phaeacians are examples of fantasy, while those relating to real places based on Crete or Egypt represent mere imagination, as well as the arts of plausible fiction.

At the same time, it is worthwhile to ask whether we can find an element of reticence in the use or execution of fantasy. It has long been noted that Homer seems to play down the element of fantasy in what are still unavoidably fantastic

stories. Do others follow suit? We could say that metamorphosis by nature invites detailed catalogue, as of limbs in the process of transformation. Where Homer will gloss over a whole sequence of disguises for Proteus, Ovid will be tempted to make the most of any such process. Perhaps the ultimate absurdity is reached when a pirate crew discuss one another's metamorphoses as they are actually taking place.

Fantasy does not necessarily require to flourish in isolation. Often enough we can expect to find it allied to parody, satire or other modes of distortive treatment. We can also think of it in other ways: Lucian might see himself more readily as an arch-liar than as a writer of fantasy or as a tall-story-teller let loose on the whole repertoire of classical texts.

In the preface, I raised the question of why there seemed no-one quite like Lewis Carroll's Alice in ancient fantasy. We might suggest that this is because children are not accorded the attention in the Graeco-Roman world that they attained in the Victorian. Philostratus' 10-year-old boy in the first set of *Eikones* is given some of the reactions of an inquisitive child, but these are not particularly memorable. On the other hand, Europa's charmingly naïve and rational words to the bull as they cross the water to Crete could perhaps be seen to come close.

Critical reaction, both ancient and modern, can be felt to cover at least similar fields to those encountered in the ancient world: talking plants, people debating their own existence, games of ambiguous decodings and the like can find a place in texts before or after the Renaissance and call for similar responses. One hopes that in the future, students of modern fantasy will be able to acquaint themselves with a wider canon of ancient materials than Ovid, Lucian and the *Odyssey* for comparison.

I end with a text that shows ancient fantasy to be alive and flourishing:

'I was walking along the Broad, as I usually do, when I met Jupiter coming out of Blackwell's'. So began (in elegant Latin) an Oxford University Oration honouring Sir Basil Blackwell as the Jupiter of booksellers.² But before the joke is explained away, the sentence offers us a striking instance of fantasy which is intended to take the listener by surprise, and might lead us on to further enquiry.

Notes

1 Petronius, *Satyrice* 38.15.

2 J.G. Griffith, *Oratiunculae Oxonienses Selectae* (Oxford, 1985), 18, adapting Horace *Satire* 1.9.1ff.

Appendix

Some fantastic nonsense

Verbal fantasy

There is little nonsense as such in extant ancient literature (as there is relatively little in English). The main difference is that children occupy a somewhat different status in the Graeco-Roman world. There is no literature specifically for them (except conceivably Aesopic fables and snatches of nursery verses, like those incidentally preserved in Petronius' *Satyricon*¹); in Antiquity, a child is a miniature adult and has to make his way with Homer. There is little interest either in children as the subject of literature—again one has to go to scraps like the charming little dialogue on mental arithmetic in the middle of Horace's *Ars Poetica*.² Their main function in literature might be as moral objects to be instructed by Socrates at the beginning of Platonic dialogues. Under these restrictions, nonsense for children or children's nonsense for adults has little place, and a whole dimension of pseudo-naïve literature is lost.

Mangled mythology

Some special situations do, however, call for their fair share of nonsense. Lucian mentions a terrified *grammaticus* who, when pressed for an answer to the question 'Who is the King of the Achaeans?' answers a totally unrelated question with 'They had a thousand ships'.³ But this is outdone by the nonsensical mythology spouted by Trimalchio in his attempts to impress his more literary guests. A mime performance is explained as follows:⁴

Diomedes and Ganymedes were the two brothers. Their sister was Helen. Agamemnon carried her off and offered a hind to Diana in her place. So now Homer is describing how the Trojans and Tarentines fought each other. Agamemnon of course won and married off his daughter Iphigenia to Achilles. This drove Ajax insane, and in a moment or two he'll explain how it ended.

The reader can expect to be entertained by Trimalchio's lack of education, but it is worthwhile to pause and account for the cause of some of his howlers.

Diomede and Ganymede belong far apart in the mythological record, but their similarity of ending (*homoioleuton*) causes them to be mis-associated as a pair, like the brothers Castor and Pollux, the actual brothers of Helen. Agamemnon did not of course carry off Helen but mounted the great expedition to get her back after Paris had carried her off, perhaps the most extreme howler Trimalchio could have come up with. The Tarentines are a further illustration of Trimalchio's confusion of the Trojan and the Second Punic War.⁵ He then further confuses Helen and Agamemnon's own daughter Iphigeneia, enticed to the Greek camp by the prospect of marriage to Achilles and indeed snatched away by Diana with the substitution of the hind. What drove Ajax insane was losing the contest for Achilles' arms to Odysseus. Hence, Trimalchio succeeds in producing a multiple muddle of the most familiar mythology.

Nor is this his first collection of schoolboy howlers:⁶

I have some three-gallon bumpers <depicting> how Cassandra killed her sons, and the boys are lying there dead—very lifelike. I have a bowl my patron left to me with Daedalus shutting Niobe in the Trojan Horse ...

In this instance, Trimalchio seems to be confusing Cassandra with Medea. Daedalus had nothing to do with the Trojan horse but is brought in as the ultimate brilliant inventor, who shut Pasiphae into the wooden cow, here mistranslated into Niobe inside the horse.

Apart from the almost compulsive confusion, we might note an instinctive cruelty as well. Trimalchio's version of the Cyclops story has the monster twisting off the hero's thumb with pincers. This may actually allude to a non-Homeric variant on the tale, which has the hero having to cut off his own finger to escape the Cyclops⁷—just the sort of variant to appeal to Trimalchio.

Nonsense verbiage

The Satire of oracles can result in deliberate obfuscation, as when Apollo gives a demonstration of his oracle-mongering skills to his fellow deities:⁸

Hark to the words of the prophet, oracular words of Apollo,
Touching the shivery strife in which heroes are facing each other.
Loudly they shout in the battle, and fast-flying words are their weapons;
Many a blow while the hisses of conflict are ebbing and flowing
This way and that shall be dealt on the crest of the plowtail stubborn;
Yet when the hook-taloned vulture the grasshopper grips in his clutches,
Then shall the rain-bearing crows make an end of their cawing forever:
Vict'ry shall go to the mules, and the ass will rejoice in his offspring!

None of the other gods can make much sense of these ramblings, with their faint hints of Herodotus in the latter half. The oracle battles in Aristophanes' *Knights* between the sausage seller and the Paphlagonian have a similar intent,⁹ as have the

pair of rival oracle predictions in Lucian's *Peregrinus*,¹⁰ in which Lucian spikes Peregrinus' prediction with an oracle of Bakis doubtless of his own invention.

Prose fiction can claim isolated episodes of nonsense, as in the following dialogue of the deaf from Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*:¹¹

'Good morning, my friend. Could you please tell me where one might find lodgings?'

'Just here, by the headland', he replied. 'It got snagged on a sunken rock yesterday, and now it is full of holes!'

'That is not what my question was about', I said, 'But it would be very helpful if you could find room for us yourself, or tell us someone else who might'. 'It was not me, he replied. I was not out with them. No, I hope Tyrrhenos never gets so old and silly as to do such a stupid thing. It was those young whippersnappers who are to blame: they do not know their way round the reefs and put down their nets in the wrong place'.

Eventually it dawned on me that he was somewhat hard of hearing ...

Gobbledegook and bombastiloquence

Oracular obfuscations aside, there are several examples of bogus foreign languages: Persian in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, Scythian in Lucian's *Alexander*, Punic in Plautus' *Poenulus*, 'Indian' in the *Charition Mime*. In each case, the author has only to mix a few classical elements into a jumble of barbarian syllables.¹² Much more common are styles of diction which demand fantastic expressions. Aeschylus' pretentious tragic diction is the object of parody in Aristophanes' *Frogs*; its original effect is to create an otherworldly diction for a heroic age. Socrates in *Clouds* rattles off a whole string of terms for sophists:¹³

*Thouriomanteis, iatrotechnas, sphragidonuchargokomētas,
Kykliōn te chorōn aismatokamptas, andras meteōrophenakas*

(Prophets sent beyond sea, quacks of every degree, fops signet and jewel bedecked,

Astrological knaves and fools who their staves of dithyrambs proudly rehearse).

Even when parody is not the purpose, Comic poets can indulge in strings of outlandish expressions (Chorus syllables of *Birds* and *Frogs*, etc.). One thinks of Lysistrata's appeal to *spermagoraiolekitholachanapōlides* (egg-and-seed-and-pot-herb-market-girls) and *skorodopandokeutriartopōlides* (garlic-selling-barmaid-baking-girls).¹⁴

The aerial armies in Lucian's *True Histories* feature a roll-call of curious hybrid creatures which again call for facile compounds.¹⁵ One thinks back to Aeschylus' notorious *xouthos hippalektryōn* (tawny cock-horse) in Aristophanes' *Frogs*,¹⁶ but each of Lucian's creatures has its own rationale. The Hippogypes

(‘vulture dragoons’) are prominent, and other cavalry regiments are similarly contrived, with self-explanatory functions—Hippomurmēkes (Ant-dragoons), Psyllotoxotai, (Flea-archers)—while others are not explained: how exactly do the Skorodomachoi (Garlic-fighters) fight?

Nor is the surprise of invented pretentious diction necessarily less in New Comedy, where Plautus, at least in Latin, can enhance a sense of fun with invented proper names.¹⁷ Particularly notable are the bombastiloquent names of soldiers: Cleomachus (*Bacchides*), Pyrgopolynikes ‘taker of towers’, (*Miles gloriosus*), Stratophanes ‘parader of armies’, (*Truculentus*), Polymachaeroplages ‘son of many blows of the dagger’ (*Pseudolus*). Still more absurdly, these sorts of names can be doubled: (Therapontigonus Platgidorus, ‘Slave son Rattle-gift (*Curculio*) or Bumbomachides Clutomestoridysarchides ‘Bumble fighter-son Famous-adviser-hard-to-rule-son (*Miles*). The ultimate accumulation uses Greek patronymics to invest Sagaristio in *Persa* with Vaniloquides Virginesuendonides Nugiepiloquides Argentumextenebronides Tedigniloquides Nugides Palponides Quodsemelarrripides Numqameripides;¹⁸ the names are claimed to be in accordance with Persian ‘contortuplication’. It is as if the reduction of fantasy in the dramatic conventions themselves can be compensated at least in part by fantastic diction. Such diction naturally invites the kind of birdcalls that are routine in Aristophanes’ *Birds*: popopopopopopopopopou is closely followed by titititititititina or torotorotorototinx/kikkabau. kikkabau/torotorotoro-torolililix.¹⁹

The prose authors who draw on New Comedy in the early Empire can luxuriate similarly in the comic names of parasites. Alciphron’s *Letters of Parasites* considerably outdo the invented correspondents among fishermen, farmers and courtesans in florid polysyllables, as in Trechedeipnus to Lopadecthambus ‘Dinner-chaser to Dish-crazy’.²⁰

We can note the fantasy in *Frogs* of literal word-weighing. Euripides and Aeschylus are required to have individual lines of verse weighed for content;²¹ Euripides’ first effort contains a whole ship, but Aeschylus’ offering includes a river. A second round has Euripides’ persuasion outweighed by Aeschylus’ word death; a third attempt has Euripides’ mace trounced by Aeschylus’ pile-up of chariots and corpses.

Verbal invention can be contrived in another direction. In Lucian’s *Judgement of Vowels*, we find a court-case between Sigma and Tau over the alleged infringements of the latter in the former’s territory. The revived Atticism of the Early Empire brought perverted imitations of Attic diction, including the salvaging of archaic words for their own sake. There is an extended satire of these in Lucian’s *Lexiphanes*: several pages describe the most mundane human activities in terms of new, obsolete or malformed words. Still more grotesque is the sequel: the foolish reciter is given an emetic and forced to vomit the rest of his vocabulary.²²

Rhetoric run riot

We should also note the degree to which an educational system preoccupied with rhetoric could of itself encourage the creation of fantasy. Once the impression has been given that a speaker has been somehow carried away, then terms like *verbal*

fantasy can come into play. Critics of rhetoric are not slow to suggest that the world of declaimers was a fantasy world. The Elder Seneca records a mannered absurd question: Albucius Silo had asked ‘why is a cup broken when it falls, but not a sponge?’²³ This was picked up to be parodied by Cestius Pius: ‘Why do thrushes fly, but not pumpkins?’ Albucius had also used the outlandish phrase ‘a wooden sack’ for the disabled boat into which a man had put a patricidal brother. Cestius remonstrated at his indifferent audience: ‘Why does nobody put these people in a wooden sack and send them to the land where cups get broken but not sponges?’²⁴ Nor is this an isolated case. Seneca notes how intoxicated a declaimer could be with the sacrifice of the three hundred Spartans at Thermopylae: Three hundred, yes, but men, but armed, but Spartans, but at Thermopylae: ‘I have never seen three hundred more numerous’.²⁵

It might be suggested that nonsense is as unclassifiable and whimsical as fantasy itself can be. Despite the absence of a concept of children’s literature, we can expect a Philistine’s mis-recollections of myth to qualify, as will comic gibberish for the ridicule of foreigners, birdcalls, bombastiloquent speech in general or flights of overblown rhetoric. The land of broken cups is a land without rules, in which fantasy presides happily over anarchy.

Notes

- 1 Petronius, *Satyrica*, e.g. 64.12.
- 2 Horace, *Ars Poetica* 326–330.
- 3 Lucian, *De Mercede Conductis* 11.
- 4 Petronius, *Satyrica* 59.4f.
- 5 Compare 50.5, confusing Troy and Saguntum.
- 6 Petronius *Satyrica* 52.1f.
- 7 *Satyrica* 48.7, as suggested by M.S. Smith (Oxford 1975) ad loc.
- 8 Lucian, *Juppiter Tragoedus* 31 (tr. A.M. Harmon).
- 9 Aristophanes *Knights* 1015–1089.
- 10 Lucian, *De morte Peregrini* 29f.
- 11 *Aethiopica* 5.18.4ff.
- 12 Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 104; Lucian, *Alexander* 51; Plautus, *Poenulus* 930–949; *Charition Mime*, *Oxyrynchus papyrus* 413.
- 13 *Clouds* 332ff. (tr. B.B. Rogers)
- 14 *Lysistrata* 457f. (tr. B.B. Rogers).
- 15 Lucian, *Verae Historiae* 13–16, see c. 14.
- 16 Aristophanes, *Frogs* 932.
- 17 Translations from Duckworth (1952).
- 18 *Persa* 702ff.
- 19 Aristophanes, *Birds* 310; 314; 259–261.
- 20 Alciphron *Ep.* 3.1 (so Benner and Fobes).
- 21 Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1365ff.
- 22 Lucian, *Lexiphanes* 1–21.
- 23 *Controversia* 7 praef. 8.
- 24 *Controversia* 7 praef. 9.
- 25 *Numquam vidi plures trecentos*, *Suasoria* 2.18.

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